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**MIKE  
SHAYNE  
MYSTERY MAGAZINE ANNUAL**

1973  
EDITION

**NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL  
THE LAS VEGAS COURIER**

by BRETT HALLIDAY

*Melody Deems, go-go girl extraordinary, was sleek and smart and she loved a fast buck. Now she was dead and ugly and unmourned. And where did the half-million dollars in skim money disappear? Could Mike Shayne bring back her phantom killers, before he in turn died, too, if he did not succeed?*

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# The Las Vegas Courier

by BRETT HALLIDAY

## THE NEW COMPLETE MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

MIKE SHAYNE was abruptly wary without knowing why. The feeling came over him as he escorted his secretary, Lucy Hamilton, out the main door of the elegant hotel into the balmy early morning. He stopped to scrape something from the sole of his shoe, looking around as he did so.

The U-shaped Cassandra spread light. It was a towering structure of stark, modernistic architecture, the newest, glassy and fountain-prone hotel in Miami Beach. People were hustling in and out and around as if it were 1:20 in the afternoon instead of 1:20 of a Tuesday morning.

Polished cars pulled up to the main entry, the occupants greeted by the doorman in tails and top hat. Polished cars pulled away. No deep building shadows to conceal lurking purse snatchers, muggers, rapists, assassins, or any other antisocial grifter.

But Shayne smelled danger. He wished he was wearing his .45 as he took Lucy's bicep in strong fingers and piloted her along the walk that flanked the hotel drive, his eyes busy.

"What's the matter, Michael?"

At another time he might have chuckled at the perception of the girl with the brown curls

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*She was sleek and smart and she loved a fast buck.*

*Now she was dead and ugly and unmourned.*

*Could Mike Shayne pierce a web of incredible  
danger and bring back her phantom killer?*

---

and lithe physical structure. The perception never ceased to amaze him. But at the moment his lone interest was in reaching his parked convertible. There was a gun stashed in a special compartment under the front seat.

"I've got that feeling, Angel," he growled as they moved swiftly along, her heels clicking a rhythm.

Lucy glanced around. "Everything looks normal." "Doesn't it?"

And then they heard the shrill scream above them.

Shayne reflexively shoved Lucy toward the strip of grass that separated the sidewalk and the Cassandra wall, turned and flattened himself in a high racing dive in the opposite direction.

He landed on the hood of a parked car. Flipping, he stared up at the spread-eagle body that was outlined against the star-filled sky. The body was up high yet, out from the row after row of wrought iron balcony railings. It seemed to be

floating. Still, he knew the body was plummeting fast. He knew, too, it was the body of a woman.

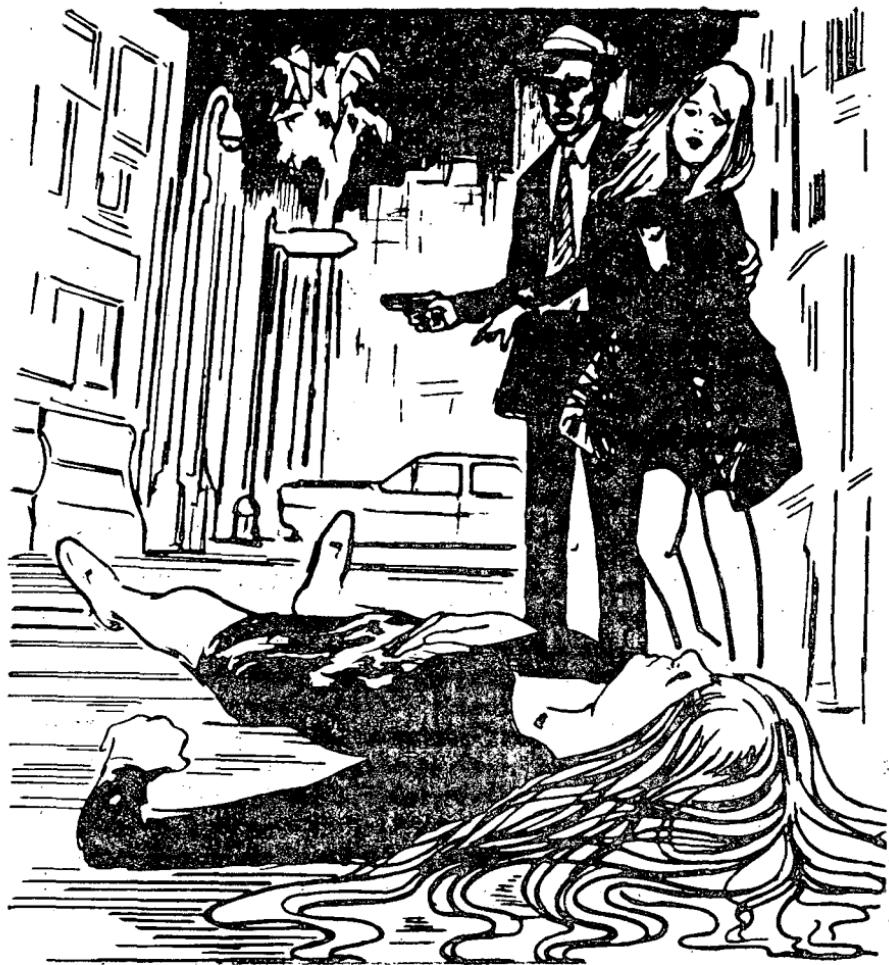
A scream of terror trailed the descent, and then there was the horrible sound of splintering bones and gushing of innards squeezed through suddenly split skin.

The tepid night abruptly was quiet. Shayne sat up on the hood of the car. People had become statues. They were frozen out there.

He propelled himself from the car hood. Lucy came out from under a palm tree. She moved cautiously. "Michael?"

All hell broke loose. The statues came alive, shouted, shrilled, babbled and moved in. People rushed forward, then skidded to a halt as they saw what was on the sidewalk. It was not a pretty sight.

The expensively-dressed woman had landed on her back. She was spread and split, blood snaking along the blue of her dress. A thick substance spread from under her dark hair. Her



face remained intact. It was screwed up in a combination of horror and pain.

"Michael?"

"Yeah, Angel."

"We just met her an hour ago—in Salvadore's suite . . ."

"Yeah."

The dead woman's name was Melody Deans.

## II

SALVADORE AIRES was a Detroit multimillionaire. He was in insurance. He had the Midas touch too. Salvadore could look at an ancient and very dead volcano and it would spit valuable diamonds almost immediately.

About two years before, Shayne had successfully turned a trick for the insurance giant. It had saved Salvadore and one of his companies a bundle. But the two men could have met casually at a beach blowout and they would have finished the night together. The relationship between them was an instant thing. The large redhead liked Salvadore Aires. The lean, dark tycoon liked the Miami private investigator. It was why Shayne and Lucy Hamilton had gone to the party at the Cassandra.

"Just a small bash, Mike," Salvadore had said over the phone. "Just a few friends stopping by; nothing really fancy."

"The occasion?"

Salvadore Aires chuckled. "Hell, do I need an occasion, my friend? Okay, if I do, we haven't seen one another in about a year."

"I thought maybe you had found another wife," the detective needled.

Salvadore's laugh was a burst. He had had five wives. There would be a sixth. He liked having a wife. The only trouble was he liked other women too. He had the money and could make the time to humor his pleasures.

"Not yet," Aires said into the phone. "Still roaming the field. But—well, you know, I've

always got the eye open. Incidentally, how about Lucy? You think she's susceptible?"

"You could ask her, pal."

Another burst of laughter. "And get my head chopped off? No, thanks, friend. But bring her along, hear? There will be some very handsome, very eligible, gents present. Maybe she'll discover there's more to life than being a secretary-girl friend of an ugly redhead."

Shayne's grin spread across his Flagler Street office. "See you 'round ten."

"Mike?"

Shayne had started to put the phone together. He jammed the receiver back against his ear, instantly alerted by what he thought was a sudden quality of urgency in the summons.

"Yeah?"

There was a pause; then another chuckle. "I'm in town for a few days of fun and games, Mike, that's all. But—well, maybe I'll have a surprise for you." No urgency now.

*Click.* Salvadore had hung up. Shayne stared at the phone receiver for a couple of seconds before putting it in its cradle. His grin was huge again. Yes, sir, he liked Salvadore Aires.

The Cassandra suite was huge, expensive and crowded. Shayne recognized a few faces here and there. By pooling their

dough, these people could buy and sell nations. They had one thing in common: money. It never hurt to mingle with the blessed. A guy never knew where his next thousand might come from.

Salvadore was a tall man, almost as tall as the detective, but where Shayne was huge across the shoulders, thick and hard in body and leg and long ago had given up fighting unruly red hair, Salvadore was a trim, slender man with a full head of perfectly groomed silver and brown hair, an almost-too-narrow face and greenish eyes that laughingly reflected merry independence.

He also wore a flashy white blonde on his left arm this night. The blonde had sauce, youth and cleavage in a pale pink gown that left no doubt about her physical attributes. Her name was Jo.

Mildly amused, Shayne wondered if Jo was to be Number Six.

"Whee," breathed Lucy as Salvadore took Jo off to a cluster of four men in a corner. "She might as well be naked."

Shayne chuckled. "Perhaps she is," he said philosophically.

He pointed Lucy through open french doors and onto the small balcony. They were alone. Seventeen stories below them Miami Beach sparkled. Shayne

swirled cognac and drank. Lucy sipped Seven-Up.

Then, behind them, Salvadore Aires said, "You in the mood for marrying, Lucy darling?"

When they turned, he was laughing softly. He had rid himself of the blonde bomb. Shayne noticed she was cornered by the four men now.

"Maybe," countered Lucy. "You?"

"Always," grinned Salvadore.

"Your Jo has vitality," said Lucy.

Salvadore's laugh was genuine. "Yes. I wish I could recall her last name."

"Oh."

"She came with someone. I don't remember who."

Shayne grinned, finished his cognac.

"Okay, Mike," accused Salvadore. "What's that smug look supposed to convey?"

"Just fun and games," said the detective with a shrug.

"Un-huh," Salvadore nodded. "And *not* my potential surprise."

Aires turned then as if on a silent signal, glanced over his shoulder.

A woman had entered the suite. She stood alone slightly inside the door, a bag purse dangling from her right shoulder. She looked in her early

forties, was tastefully groomed in body and wardrobe, leaning a little toward the severe. She wore a plain, sky-blue street dress that had come from an expensive shop and a diamond wristlet that was a stark contradiction. Her hair was dark, her legs firm, and her inventory of the suite consuming.

"But there," breathed Salvadore Aires, "is my surprise, Mike."

Shayne watched his friend go to the woman and he had the distinct impression that everyone else in the suite suddenly did not exist for the lean man. Salvadore took the woman's hands, pecked her cheek.

They talked for a few seconds. The woman's face did not change. Salvadore's posture did. He took a step backward, seemed to be pulling the woman slightly. She remained rooted, frowning slightly, looking around.

Salvadore stepped back into her, talked again. The woman answered him. Then they stood in silence briefly before Salvadore turned and gently escorted her through people.

"Lucy Hamilton, Mike Shayne," Salvadore said, sounding vaguely triumphant, "Melody Deans."

"Melody is from Las Vegas,"

he continued. "Just got in on a flight."

Up close, Melody Deans looked fatigued, nervous and on the borderline of impoliteness.

"Unfortunately," she said, "it was an uncomfortable flight. We hit much turbulence."

"Will you excuse us for a few minutes?" Salvadore asked.

"Miss Lucy Hamilton, Mr. Shayne," Melody Deans nodded in polite acknowledgement.

Then they were gone, threading through the people again. Shayne watched them disappear behind a closed door far across the main room of the suite.

"Number Six, Angel," Shayne said. "You just met her."

"I'm not so sure, Michael."

Shayne gave her a sharp glance. "When they return, Salvadore will have an announcement to make. I've got a hunch it's the reason he's pitching this—"

"I don't think so," said Lucy.

"How come?"

"There's something about her. She has more than marriage to Salvadore Aires on her mind. It's something—something she hasn't told him. She's telling him now. Didn't you notice how she didn't want to come over here and meet us, at least not immediately? She wanted

to talk to him first. She has something very heavy on her mind."

A houseman with a silver tray of drinks approached. The redhead plucked a fresh cognac from the tray. He nodded to the blonde Jo still penned by the four men. He laughed gently. Jo couldn't get her eyes off the door that hid Salvadore Aires and Melody Deans.

"Hopes dashed," said Lucy. "It happens to every girl sometime in life. Even those with cleavage. But we all recover. You watch."

Shayne found himself keeping an eye on the closed door too. He wasn't sure why the door bothered him, except that he knew Salvadore Aires seldom disappeared for long when he was a host.

"Would you like to go over there and open that door and find out what is going on?" Lucy asked after awhile.

Shayne countered, "Would you?"

"I'm dying."

The redhead laughed, inventoried the room. "Well, our lady of the cleavage has switched horses."

The white blonde had a new arm to lean on. It belonged to a stumpy, fat man who obviously was proud of a thick beard.

"Maybe we should leave, Michael. Maybe Salvadore wo-



uld like to have all of us leave. Perhaps we could start it."

Shayne looked at his watch. Twelve-twenty-five. "Yeah, maybe," he agreed.

Suddenly across the room the closed door opened and Melody Deans and Salvadore Aires re-entered. No one, Shayne noticed, seemed to pay any particular attention to them. But he was curious.

Melody Deans looked distraught, her mouth a tight line, skin coloring gone, and she moved straight to the corridor door and disappeared. Salvadore watched her. He wasn't the Salvadore Aires that Shayne knew. This Salvadore's juices had quit flowing. Suddenly. He looked as if he had been hit

with a wet fish and couldn't believe it.

Salvadore moved through the people.

"Trouble, pal?" Shayne asked.

Salvadore seemed to gather himself slightly. "What?"

"You and Miss Deans."

"Oh. No. That was just a little misunderstanding, Mike."

"She's an attractive woman, Sal. Looks as if she's got savvy."

"Mike, can we drop it?"

"It's dropped. Grab yourself a drink. We'll have it and then Lucy and I are going to cut."

"What for?"

"We work for a living, stiff."

Salvadore tried on a grin. "Insurance bums don't, huh?"

"If the rates I pay are a guide, they don't have to."

"You ever figure how those rates got where they are, Mike?"

Shayne felt better. Salvadore's juices seemed to have started again. At least, he suddenly was hep to the one-upmanship game.

Salvadore became himself, the gracious host, the party man, fun and games. It seemed as if he had put Melody Deans out of his mind. The blonde Jo attempted to hitch up anew, but Salvadore put her off politely and she proved intelligent enough to return to her

stubby friend. Shayne's opinion of the blonde bomb went up a notch.

Then Lucy said, "Michael, it's after one o'clock."

They left the protesting Salvadore, rode the silent express elevator down to the elegant lobby and walked outside to Melody Deans' death plunge.

Uniformed cops swooped down. They finally were followed by plainclothed detectives. Red police car lights swirled, creating weird glows across the front of the hotel. Clusters of people continued to surge forward toward the body, then fell back with murmurs of distaste. Presently a small, aggressive man, impeccably dressed, moved in beside Shayne who remained on one knee near the corpse.

Shayne looked up. The small man moistened an index finger and stroked a threadlike black mustache. It was one of the few times in his life that Peter Painter, chief of Miami Beach detectives, had the opportunity to tower over Mike Shayne. The two men shared an inborn animosity toward each other that neither ever was able to explain.

Painter snapped, "I might've known. What are you doing here?" His small black eyes glittered.

Shayne stood, looked down on the detective chief. "I live over there in Miami, remember?" he said.

"Point," Painter replied coldly.

"I have a friend staying at the Cassandra. Lucy and I were visiting."

"You two just happened to stumble across this diver, huh?"

"She was no diver, Painter."

"She fell?"

"She was thrown or dropped."

"Oh, God," breathed Painter. He looked around as if seeking condolence.

"Smell her," Rasped Shayne.

"Huh?"

"Melody Deans stinks of chloroform."

Painter jerked.

"And a diamond wristlet is missing. I saw her wearing it earlier," the redhead said.

### III

PETER PAINTER took time to establish order at the death scene, rid the area of gawkers and have the body covered before he thumbed Mike Shayne and Lucy Hamilton to an unmarked police car. "Okay, shamus, explain how you know the deceased."

Shayne did. Briefly.

"And this Aires is where now?"

"Try Suite 1745."

"Michael," Lucy Hamilton interrupted in a soft voice, "Salvadore is coming out of the hotel. Someone must have phoned upstairs."

Salvadore Aires was allowed a quick look at the body. He turned aside and vomited. When he had recovered, Painter said, "Can we talk now?"

Salvadore said he had known Melody Deans for almost three years. He occasionally traveled to Las Vegas, maybe every six weeks or so. He liked to gamble. He also had found Melody Deans attractive. They had dated often in the last eighteen months. A few weeks ago, Melody had told him that she was going to take some time from her job as a social hostess at a hotel-motel-casino; she was going to come to Miami Beach for relaxation. He had made arrangements to be in Miami Beach at the same time. He even had made the hotel reservation for her, to be sure she got a suitable suite.

"What floor are you on, Mr. Aires?"

"The seventeenth."

"Front?" Chief Painter looked up.

"Yes."

"Miss Deans?"

"Seventeen, front."

"Next door?"

"No." Salvadore Aires lit a

cigarette. Shayne noticed the shaking hands.

"Painter, as you should know, hotel accomodations in Miami Beach are not the easiest obtainables. I desired adjoining suites. Such was not available. The Cassandra management, I thought, was quite accomodating when Melody and I were put on the same floor."

Painter shifted in thought. "Tell me, Aires, would you say you and Miss Deans were close?"

"Yes."

"Intimate?"

"That depends on what you mean."

"I mean, were you expecting to sleep together?"

"Why would I reserve two suites? People don't sneak around anymore, Mr. Painter. Haven't you heard?"

"Did you kill her?"

"Kill?" Salvadore Aires suddenly looked confused. He shot a look at Shayne.

Shayne said flatly, "It looks like murder, pal."

"But I supposed—"

Salvadore didn't finish his thought. He crushed the cigarette under the toe of his shoe. His brow was furrowed. Presently he said, "You believe she didn't commit suicide, Mike?" He sounded subdued.

Shayne countered, "You

know of any reason she might have?"

"No," Salvadore said quickly. "I just assumed—"

Painter interrupted, "Do you know any reason she might've been killed?"

"No."

"How about if we take a look at her room?" Shayne suggested.

"Not you, shamus," Painter said quickly. "You aren't involved in this. You don't have a client and, even if you did, this is Miami Beach. You can bull your way with Will Gentry in Miami all you want, but over here—"

He cut off the barrage as Salvadore Aires took out a coat pocket wallet. He removed a dollar bill from the wallet and thrust it at Shayne.

"Shayne is hired, Mr. Painter," he said in a flat voice. "I'm paying him to find Melody's killer."

"That doesn't mean a thing, Aires," Painter snapped. "He doesn't get into the room."

"Nor do you," Salvadore countered, "without the proper papers. It is my room. I paid for it. I—"

"This is a murder investigation," Painter snarled, anger curling the edges of the words. "I don't need papers!"

"Try going up there without my permission and see how fast

you and your city are sued. It may not stop you, admitted, but we are going to make some choice headlines in the next few days. I believe Shayne has a friend, Timothy Rourke, who is a Miami newspaperman and who—”

“Aires,” Painter cut in coldly, “I’m going to concede to you for one reason only. I have some more questions to ask Shayne. Let’s go upstairs.”

He stomped away. Shayne shot Salvadore Aires a glance. Salvadore was grim, his mouth a thin line.

Painter collected an assistant hotel manager and a key at the desk and they rode the express elevator. But they found they didn’t need the key when they arrived at what had been Melody Deans’ room. The door was ajar.

Shayne scowled as Painter held everyone back with outstretched arms while he stared at the door. Light in the room showed through the door crack, but no sound came from inside.

Shayne looked at Lucy. Her lips were pursed, eyes bright. He started to reach across Painter’s shoulder, then the small man put up a hand and with one extended finger pushed the door until they all could see inside the suite.

The main room was vast and expensively furnished. There

was light everywhere. On the opposite side, the french doors were wide open, exposing the balcony. A breeze blew in, but the breeze did not clear the smell of chloroform or right the general disarray. The room looked ransacked.

No one said anything for several seconds; then Painter dismissed the unhappy assistant manager. Shayne moved around the room, looked through two open interior doorways. Each revealed a bedroom and each bedroom had been pawed thoroughly. In one, two new suitcases were open on the bed and feminine clothing was scattered everywhere. The suitcases had been cleaned out. A sliding closet door across the room had been pushed or left open. It revealed three hanging dresses, a pant suit and another dress on the carpeting.

Shayne continued to inventory the room. He spotted a passport and an airline ticket envelope on a dressing table. He looked inside both and scowled. The passport contained a photograph of Melody Deans but it was made out in the name of Flora Ann Perkins. The detective found a one-way ticket to Madrid, Spain, in the airline envelope. The ticket was made out to F. Perkins.

“What have you got, Shayne?”

He turned on Painter's barked question. The dapper man crossed the room swiftly, took the passport and ticket. He studied both, then grunted. "Who the hell is Flora Ann Perkins?"

Shayne shrugged.

"But this is Melody Deans, isn't it?" Painter said, holding up the passport picture.

"Yeah."

"So what was she doing? Scooting out of the country under a false name?"

"I don't know," Shayne answered. He was remembering what had seemed to be a mild argument between Salvadore Aires and Melody Deans at the party, remembering how Salvadore and the woman had closeted themselves.

"Sal?" he called out.

But Salvadore Aires did not provide an answer. He seemed deeply puzzled as he stared at the passport and ticket.

"I can't help you," he said.

"There's a bag purse in the outer room," Painter said, looking around. "On the floor and open, like these suitcases, everything scattered. I didn't spot money or travelers checks. It looks like she was cleaned out. You said she flew in tonight, right?"

"Yes. The flight was due in at International around eleven. It must have been on time,

perhaps even a bit ahead of schedule. If you will recall, Mike, it was around midnight when she arrived at my suite."

Shayne nodded. He also remembered that Melody Deans had not stayed more than thirty minutes, which meant she had returned to her suite around twelve-thirty if she had come straight back. And it had been one-twenty when she had come plunging down the seventeen flights to die against the sidewalk. That put her in the room for just slightly under an hour, plenty of time in which to be attacked by a hotel burglar.

But something was wrong. Something other than the scattered clothing, the lingering smell of chloroform, the suite was spotless, no cigarette butts; no used glasses or cups, no magazines, newspapers.

Shayne went to the bath between the two bedrooms, snapped on a light. It was spotless, the paper band on the toilet still intact. No damp towels or wash clothes, no water on the tile floor, the shower curtain hanging straight and clean, the two wash bowls glistening in the light.

Painter snapped, "What's eating you, Shayne?"

"The place is too damn clean." The redhead explained swiftly. Painter nodded in

agreement and Salvadore Aires wore a deep frown.

From the doorway, Lucy Hamilton added, "A woman wouldn't sit in a chair for almost an hour, Michael. She'd smoke a cigarette, wash her hands, fiddle with her hair, turn down a bed, unpack. A woman would do something."

"So would a man," Shayne mused. "Okay, it means Melody Deans didn't stop here after checking in. She probably had the bags sent up while she went straight to your place, Sal. It also means she did not return directly here after leaving the party, or she returned and found someone ransacking, was subdued with the chloroform and dropped from the balcony."

"Michael," Lucy put in again, "she should have screamed if she walked in and found—"

"We'll check that out," Painter interrupted.

"There's also the possibility," Shayne said, "the burglar had latched the door, heard her key in the lock, had time to get behind the door with his chloroform patch and got her before she could yell."

"A burglar, huh," Painter snorted.

Shayne's look was hard. "How are you figuring it? I told you she was wearing a diamond

wristlet. It's gone and—hell, man, all you have to do is look at this place."

"Just a run-of-the-mill hotel snoozer who uses chloroform—and kills."

Shayne didn't twitch a muscle against Painter's near-sneer.

"He slaps her with chloroform," Painter went on harshly, "puts her under. So he's got all night to plunder. My God, Shayne, the guy'd have time to wallpaper the joint! So why kill?"

"I told you she screamed coming down," Shayne said coldly. "Maybe the stuff didn't work on her, or maybe he simply missed. Maybe he took a swipe at her, missed; and then shoved—"

"The missing wristlet?" Painter interrupted again, and this time the sneer was genuine.

"Stripped from her in a struggle."

"Shayne," Painter said, suddenly sounding as if he was seeking patience, "it isn't that simple. Flora Ann Perkins."

He turned suddenly and fixed Salvadore Aires with a stony look. "Who is Flora Ann Perkins, Mr. Aires?"

Salvadore Aires blanched, took a step backward.

"I don't know," he said. "I don't understand any of this."

Painter was cruel. "Don't

give me that crap, Aires! You're sleeping with a woman! Don't stand there and tell me—

"I don't know a Flora Ann Perkins!"

"But you do know why Melody Deans was going to travel under that name."

"I do not!"

"You're lying, Mr. Aires."

Salvadore wriggled, then seemed to gather himself. He stood tall. "Mr. Painter, I can sue you for—"

"Knock it off," Painter snarled. "I'm no longer impressed. A woman was killed here tonight, a woman you have been intimate with. I want to know why the hell that woman was going to Madrid, Spain, under a false name!"

Salvadore Aires stood taut about five more seconds, then bent under the onslaught. "I can't tell you," he said in a tone that was just above a whisper. "I simply do not know if Melody planned to go to Spain, I do not know why she had a passport and an airline ticket in the name of Flora Ann Perkins. All of this is a mystery to me."

Shayne knew his friend was continuing to lie. He also knew Painter knew Salvadore Aires was lying.

"Sal?" he said, cocking shaggy eyebrows.

Salvadore persisted. "I don't know, Mike."

Shayne drew a deep breath. He wished his friend would square with them. But he decided to go along with Salvadore for the moment. He said, "Sal didn't kill the woman, Painter. He didn't leave his party."

"Not while you were there, maybe," Painter said coldly. "He could've run down here after you left."

"The chloroform?" Shayne countered. "Do you think he used chloroform?"

"Mike," Salvadore Aires put in softly, "I didn't leave my guests. You can check. I'll give you names."

"Get him the hell out of here," Painter said with a sudden wave of an arm. "I have to get this place dusted. But Aires don't go running back to Detroit—or anyplace else."

"I don't have any reason to run, Mr. Painter," Salvadore Aires said.

Leaving the suite, Shayne stopped to check the door lock. It wasn't scratched. No jimmying, but that didn't have to mean anything. He caught up with Lucy and Salvadore Aires in the corridor.

"Got any of the cognac left, pal?" he asked.

"No, Mike," said Salvadore, sounding defeated. "Not tonight."

Shayne turned hard. "You



WILL GENTRY

lied in there, Sal. Who is Flora Ann Perkins? Melody Deans needed a birth certificate to get the passport. She could fake out the rest of it, but she needed a birth certificate from someone near her age. And why was she going to Spain incognito? Was that what you two were arguing about when she came to your suite?"

"Mike, give me back my buck."

Shayne stared for a moment, then passed the dollar bill.

"You have no more interest," Salvadore Aires said flatly. "You no longer are employed. I can handle Mr. Painter."

"I can help, pal. Painter can be a bastard."

"No. It's finished."

"What's finished?"

"I'm returning to Detroit in the morning."

"Painter isn't going to like that."

"Mr. Painter will know. I won't be running. I won't be hiding."

"Sal, like Painter said, someone killed Melody Deans. Aren't you the least bit interested in who that person was and why he killed her?"

"I am not."

"Then you're hiding something."

"Am I? Good night, Mike. Good night, Lucy."

#### IV

TUESDAY MORNING glowed, promised heat before the day was finished. Mike Shayne was unimpressed as he sat staring out a window of his office. His brow was deeply furrowed, bushy red-tinted eyebrows pulled together. Sleep in the earlier hours had been fitful. He felt out of sorts with the world and with Salvadore Aires.

Lucy Hamilton buzzed the intercom from the outer office. There's a Mr. Deans to see you, Michael."

"Deans? Husband?"

"Brother."

Albert Deans was round in head and in body. He was fifty-five or so, Shayne guessed, bald and out of dress in native Miami sportswear. He looked as if he would be comfortable in laborer's clothing.

"I own farms," he said bluntly. "Three of them in Iowa. My sons are operating them. I am retired, Shayne. I've lived in Miami for two years now. Widowed. Mother died about a year ago. Of course, I go back to Iowa every so often, to see that things are going as they should. But my boys are good boys. They know how to farm. Melody should have stayed there. She never should have left home. She wouldn't be dead this morning."

"Who killed her, Mr. Shayne? I heard on the radio you were over there in Miami Beach last night, I heard you and this man Painter are investigating what happened. I went over there this morning, but I didn't get any satisfaction out of Painter. He's kind of a snotty little runt. I don't like him. Treated me like he thought it was impossible that Melody could have family, especially here in Miami."

"Just because she got in last night and I didn't know she was coming this trip, and she didn't call me right away, what difference does that make? I

don't see anything to ask questions about. She would've called today, let me know she was here. Why wouldn't she? But this man Painter got all excited when I told him I didn't know Melody was here. He wanted to make a big deal out of it."

"What kind of a deal? Melody would've called this morning. Nothing wrong with a woman taking a vacation in Miami Beach, is there? Who's going to call in the middle of the night? Melody knows I go to bed around nine, always have, probably always will. She isn't going to call, she'll wait till this morning. I can't see making a big deal out of not calling. Who could've killed her, Mr. Shayne?"

"I don't know, Mr. Deans."

"You were there, weren't you? You're a private detective, aren't you?"

"Mr. Deans, do you want me to find your sister's killer?"

"Mr. Shayne, somebody killed my sister. I want to know who and why. If I was home in Iowa I could go to the sheriff. He'd find out pronto, probably would already know. Sheriff Miller is good, knows his job, not much goes on in our county he doesn't know about, but here—What's your price for finding out who killed my sister?"

"Two hundred a day, plus expenses."

"Do I give you the two hundred now or this afternoon?" he asked, taking a checkbook from his shirt pocket. "We can settle the expenses later."

Shayne said, "Sometimes it takes longer than a few hours to find a killer."

Deans looked up from writing. "How come? Somebody must've broke in on her in her room. They say she was robbed. Well, somebody in that hotel must've seen this man fiddling with her room door or something."

"Mr. Deans, you're not depressed."

"Huh?"

"Your sister was murdered early this morning. I assume Painter took you to the morgue. You saw the body. I—"

"Certainly, I saw her. It was a shock, I want to tell you. Wait a minute—I get it. You figure I should be at the funeral parlor, huh? You figure—" He put down the ballpoint pen.

"Mr. Shayne," he said, his lips flattening, "I don't like the idea of my sister being dead. I don't like the idea of somebody killing Melody and thinking they can rob her and just go on today, eating hamburgers and stuff. I don't like it at all. That's why I'm here. That's

why I'm writing this check. I'll do my grieving in due time. Tomorrow we'll grieve. But today I want to know who killed Melody."

"Mr. Deans, I may not find the man today."

"So take tomorrow, too. Do you want me to make out the check for four hundred? Is that what you're after, Mr. Shayne?"

"Don't write the check, Mr. Deans."

The round man sat silent for a few seconds, his face pinking. Then he capped the ballpoint and stuffed the checkbook in his shirt pocket. "Sorry I took up your time, Mr. Shayne. But perhaps you'll find some satisfaction in knowing that you have just convinced me. I'm moving back to Iowa pronto, where people care about people."

"You can write the check after I find your sister's killer," Shayne said. "You can write it for a single dollar if you feel like it."

Albert Deans puffed, reddened, and then sat back with an expulsion of breath. "Mr. Shayne," he said finally, "I thank you for setting me on my butt. I needed that. I don't know what's going on. I don't know what happened to Melody, or why. God, to die like

that! Dropped from a hotel balcony—”

He sat shaking his head.

“Tell me about your sister, Mr. Deans. All you know about her.”

Melody Deans was forty-two years of age when she died. She had been gone from the Iowa farms twenty years. She had gone to California to an airline stewardess' school, worked for a line for six years before quitting and going to Las Vegas. No one in the family knew why she had quit the airline. It had been sudden. But she had found a good job in Las Vegas and had seemed settled.

Albert Deans and others in the Deans family had visited her in Las Vegas. She always had seemed happy to see her family. She treated them well, put them up in good accommodations. Perhaps a bit more fancy than the Deans were used to, but then Las Vegas was different than an Iowa farm.

Albert Deans and his wife Clara had retired in Miami. Melody had vacationed here twice a year. She stayed in a hotel, but she always spent a lot of time with Albert and Clara. In the last year it had just been with Albert, of course. Clara had died. But on this final trip to the Miami area Melody had not told Albert she was coming. Yes, it seemed a bit unusual,

but then maybe it was a sudden trip. Maybe she hadn't had time to notify Albert. Not even by telephone? Well...Albert didn't know, but there must have been a reason. Whatever it was, it was all right, Melody would have called this Tuesday morning.

Except that she was dead; murdered.

“Albert, does the name Flora Ann Perkins ring a bell?”

“No.” He frowned deeply.

“When was the last time you visited your sister in Las Vegas?”

“Three years ago, a bit before I retired. Me'n Clara went out there, spent five weeks. We was looking for a warm place to sorta hang up the harnesses, you know? Found out Las Vegas wasn't it. We came here. Who is this Perkins woman? What's she got to do—”

“She could have been a friend of Melody's.”

“Never heard of her. Never met no friends of Melody's named Perkins.”

“Melody worked in a hotel. Do you recall the name?”

“The Trout. Odd name, ain't it?”

“Who were Melody's friends here in Miami, Miami Beach?”

“Didn't have none. It was why she come down here, to get away, to spend some time alone.”

"Do you know a man named Salvadore Aires?"

"I heard his name. This Painter, he said—"

"But you never heard your sister mention his name?"

"No."

"I think she and Salvadore Aires were thinking about marrying."

"I doubt it," Deans said bluntly. "Melody went too long without marrying. She got set in her ways, lived like she wanted to. And she always seemed satisfied. How come she'd change?"

"Maybe Salvadore was the first right man to come along for her."

"I doubt it."

Shayne sat forward. "Okay, Mr. Deans, leave your phone number with Miss Hamilton in the outer office. She'll want to know a few other odds and ends. It's all for our records."

Deans stood. "You'll call me tonight about Melody?"

"I'll call you when I have something significant," Shayne said.

He waited until Deans was out of earshot and then he snapped up the phone and called his longtime friend, Will Gentry, chief of Miami police. Gentry had already heard from Peter Painter, and the Miami cops had already searched their files.

"A hotel man who packs chloroform for ready use is a little different, Mike," Gentry said, "but we didn't turn up anybody."

"I need a rundown on an Albert Deans, Will. Says he's a brother of the dead woman." Shayne filled in with particulars, then added: "Is he legit, that's all I need to know."

"What are you, an Armchair Eye these days?" Gentry wanted to know.

Gentry's voice was gruff and Shayne had a mental image of the bulky man chomping down hard on the stub of a black cigar. He grunted. "Got a lot of miles to travel."

"Okay, okay." Gentry grumbled. "I'll put a bloodhound on Deans. How long's he got? An hour?"

"He can have the entire morning," Shayne grinned.

Then the police chief wiped the grin from the redhead's face. "Just where in hell does your friend Salvadore Aires fit in all of this, Mike? Painter is hot on the guy."

"He's involved," Shayne said grimly. "Somehow, he's involved. That's what I'm up against. I've got to get how out of him. Maybe this morning. If he got any sleep, he might feel differently, think differently. I'm figuring on doing a little leaning on him."

But when Shayne telephoned the Cassandra he discovered that Salvadore Aires had checked out of the hotel.

Had Salvadore cleared out of the Cassandra to get away from the gawkers, checked into another hotel somewhere on the Beach, or had he cleared out of town? Why was he running?

Shayne sat low on his spine, a huge fist thumping the edge of his desk as his thoughts churned. Did Painter know Salvadore had hiked? If he didn't know, should he be told?

His intercom buzzed. Lucy Hamilton said, "Peter Painter is on the line, Michael."

Shayne sat up. Painter's voice was flat. "Earlier this morning, shamus, you mentioned a diamond wristlet. Was the woman wearing any other jewelry?"

"No."

Painter hesitated and Shayne envisioned the stroking of the tiny mustache. "She was thoroughly cleaned out. We didn't find a dime. Incidentally, your friend Aires has returned to Detroit. He called, said he had pressing business. I didn't buy it, but I gave him an okay. I can find him when and if I want him again. Oh, yes, he also said he had dispensed with your service." Painter paused to take a breath, then snarled, "You

stay the hell out of my hair on this one, Shayne!"

Shayne said, "I've been retained by Albert Deans."

"Goddamnit—"

The line went dead.

Salvadore had left town, and Painter had let him go? What the hell was going on? Painter didn't let murder suspects trot out from under his thumb.

Shayne went to a window, stared outside.

And Gentry had just told him Painter was hot on Salvadore. So how come he let Salvadore Aires leave town? Was Painter suddenly playing some kind of cute game?

He thumped his thigh viciously, returned to his desk. Damn, he'd wanted to lean on Salvadore, get some answers. He yelled at Lucy to look up the number of a Detroit contact. Then he phoned Leo Peterson.

"Got a tail job for you, Pete," he told the Detroit man. "Salvadore Aires, the insurance guy. You know him?"

"Not on sight, Mike, but I can round up a photo."

"He may be coming in on a commercial flight from Miami sometime today. I said may. He could switch flights in mid-stream and not show. But keep an eye, huh? And if you pick him up, stay on him. I want to know where he goes. Let me know soonest. If you can't get



me here, phone Lucy. She'll give you the numbers."

After the call Shayne sat scowling for a long time. He needed a contact in Las Vegas and he did not have one. His lone tie had died six months ago. But he needed some digging done out there. For one thing, he wanted to know if a Flora Ann Perkins lived in Las Vegas, and if she and Melody Deans had been friends. He also wanted to know what kind of action Salvadore Aires liked when in Vegas. Had he ever left himself exposed to blackmail?

From Melody Deans, for instance.

Had she told Salvadore Aires to meet her in Miami Beach

with cash? Had Salvadore attempted to haggle with her at the party? Was blackmail the reason she had a passport and an airline ticket to Spain in another name? Had she planned to collect and run?

Had Salvadore hired her murderer because of blackmail? Had he set her up?

Lucy was on the intercom again.

"There's a young man to see you, Michael," she said, and the crispness of her voice alerted Shayne. "He says he has some information about Melody Deans."

## V

"SO YOU'RE Mike Shayne, the famous private eye," the youth said with a half grin that didn't mean a thing.

Shayne sat silent, waited. The youth occupied the chair in front of the redhead's desk. He was a good looking kid in Bermuda shorts, tank top, barefooted, athletically trim, dark hair worn moderately long; maybe in his mid-twenties. He was the kind of kid, Shayne thought, who would impress women.

"I heard on the radio," he said, "you're involved in the death of this cat at the Cassandra last night, this dame

who took the long step down from the balcony."

"So far you're wasting my time, fella," Shayne said truthfully.

The youth shrugged. "Name's Cal Stone. I'm a beach boy at the Cassandra. I figure what I got is worth a hundred clams to you."

"There's cops."

"Cops don't dole out government green, Mr. Shayne."

"Okay, Cal, what've you got?"

"A hundred?"

"Depends."

The youth debated and Shayne pressed, "Figure it this way, pal: there isn't any other place to sell it. Whatever you get from me is tax-free bread."

The youth bit his lower lip, then said, "Okay, you're hanging me high, but I'm at the Cassandra last evening, entertaining a little northern mother who's down for a little relaxation from her tycoon-type husband, and I'm leaving her around twelve o'clock, little before. I'm coming down in the elevator and crossing the lobby when I see this doll checking in at the desk. And I mean she's a doll, Mr. Shayne. Very chic, very heavy, got lots of interesting things about her, including a beautiful, sparkling thing on her wrist."

"It's your dame, all right,

the one who took the long step later, only I don't know she's gonna be dead inside a couple of hours, of course. All I know is, she's a looker, checking in alone."

"Anyway, I lay back, wait for her to go upstairs, then I'm gonna get the pitch on her from the desk clerk. The only trouble is a guy checks in right behind the Deans dame and I know the guy! I also know he's on her tight, trailing her. Those kind of signs I can read in my sleep, Mr. Shayne, believe me."

"So I back off, stay out of sight. But I'm curious. I ain't seen Ralph Bastone in town for maybe a year now. We used to work together at another hotel down the street from the Cassandra, the Silver Arms. We worked the beach for maybe six, eight months together, and I was glad to see him cut when he did. He's a gunner, real competition."

"But, like I said, I'm curious. I ain't seen Ralph in a long time, and I'd heard he was out of town, had gone out west some place. So I hang around. I can't figure if Ralph is bringing the cat in, or maybe he's just on her tail. Anyway, I check with the desk after he goes upstairs, and he's signed in as a Bernard Anderson, San Diego."

"That smells lovers to me, Mr. Shayne. Ralph and the

dame are playing cutsies, check in separately as if they don't know each other from yesterday, but give 'em five minutes upstairs and they'll be in the same bed. The only trouble is—the dame fell off a balcony. Maybe Ralph pushed her. Is that worth a hundred?"

"Cal," Shayne said in a voice that grated, "if you're manufacturing this for the buck, I'll find you and grind you into little pieces."

He let it hang for emphasis. It got results. For the first time, the youth squirmed and dropped his eyes. Then he said, "I'm not putting you on, Shayne. Bastone was there, and he was with her or trailing her, I swear."

Shayne contemplated. "Where might he hang his hat if he still is in town."

"I wouldn't know, man. I only worked with the guy. And, like I said, that was a year ago, maybe a little less. All I know is, he's a gunner with the dames. I figure it's how come he split with his living-in companion. Too heavy on the gunning. Too many overtime hours, you know?"

"You don't know anything about him, but you know he was married."

"I didn't say he was married, Shayne. He and this Debbie shared a pad, that's all. I think

they had a kid, too, but I ain't sure about that. Anyway he and Debbie split. I do know that. I ran into her about a week, ten days ago. First time I'd seen her since Ralph cut. The only reason I know her, is she used to come around to the hotel sometimes, looking for Ralph. He didn't like that. He'd blow. But she came around anyway. I guess she was real hung on the guy. Anyway, I never cooled it with them, ever. Away from the Silver Arms, I never seen Ralph or Debbie."

"Where does Debbie live, Cal?"

"Haven't the slightest idea."

"Okay, it's worth fifty. My secretary will pay you as you vanish."

"Hey, a hundred, man!"

"I'm not a dame, Cal—or hadn't you noticed?" Shayne stood tall and wide, his large jaw set.

Cal Stone padded out of the inner office.

"Fifty, Lucy," Shayne yelled.

And then he heard an exchange of grunts in the outer office, a rasping of feet moving fast. A male voice said, "Easy, Adonis."

"Man, you stepped on my toes!" Cal Stone complained.

Shayne went to the open door and took in the scene. The youth and Tim Rourke of the

*Miami News* looking squared off. But Rourke was grinning. Only Cal Stone was unhappy.

"So we crashed," Rourke said to Cal Stone. "I was coming in, you were going out. No reason to start a war, kid."

Lucy Hamilton put a fifty dollar bill in Cal Stone's hand and the youth disappeared, his sandals slapping.

Rourke grinned at Shayne. "Who the hell was that?"

Shayne motioned his friend into the inner office where he explained. Rourke took it all in without interrupting. Then he shoved a hat to the back of his head and hooked a leg over the arm of the chair. He was a thin man, almost scarecrow thin, with deep-set, slate-colored eyes, a veteran newspaperman. He and Shayne had been friends for more years than either cared to count.

Rourke pinched his lower lip in thought.

"I'm here because of Melody Deans, Mike. You know that. I heard about her on the radio while I was shaving this morning, called the office. What they have is sketchy. I'm going over to see Painter, of course, but I wanted to hear it from you first. Now, about this Las Vegas angle. You're hurting, huh?"

"I lost my contact when Elmer Fletcher died, Tim. I

know a couple of guys out there, but neither of them is Elmer. I might have to take a run out there myself. I'm thinking about it."

"I know a guy who might do you some good," Rourke said. "Name's Max Wallace. He's a columnist, one of these man-about-town things. Max has been in Vegas for centuries, knowns the town's underwear. Are you interested?"

"Would he be?"

"Max is interested in anything that will get him a line of copy. It's where he lives the hardest."

"What he turns up might not be copy."

"It will be, eventually," Rourke said with a crooked grin. "I trust him, Mike."

"Okay, I may give him a buzz later today."

Shayne dug a well-thumbed phone book out of a drawer and looked up the number for the Silver Arms Hotel in Miami Beach. He had to go through three connections at the hotel before he got a manager with a crisp voice who repeated Ralph Bastone's name as if he had just chomped on a used sweat sock. But he did have a last known address for Bastone.

It was a small, two story, faded yellow stucco building on the edge of a shopping center. There was a sporting goods

store downstairs and two apartments upstairs.

Shayne and Rourke found they wanted the back apartment. Shayne rapped on the door. It was opened after a few seconds by a nicely built, slim young girl with brown hair hanging down below her shoulders. She wore blue-white jeans and a tight pullover top. She was braless and barefooted. Level blue eyes that were clear measured the two men without registering anything. She smelled of cleanliness.

"Debbie?" Shayne said.

"I don't know you," she replied. There was no animosity, and no fear. Just a simple fact.

"I'm looking for Ralph Bastone."

The girl turned and yelled into the interior of the apartment, "I think we got fuzz, Art."

The young man who appeared in the room behind her was a physical giant, taller than Shayne or Rourke. He wore faded jeans too, was bare-chested and footed, and he probably weighed 240 pounds. But there wasn't an extra ounce of flesh on him. His chest was wide and deep, and his stomach looked hard. He had long, hay-colored hair and a groomed handlebar moustache. A blonde baby of a year or so was parked

on his shoulders, tiny fat legs straddling his neck, fingers clutching the long hair.

The giant handed the baby to the girl and said, "Buzz off."

"Come on, Art," Shayne said. "We aren't here to play tough."

"I'm not playing, Red. Buzz. Ralph doesn't live here anymore."

"And you do."

"Try to throw me out. Use your friend for leverage."

"Art," said the girl, "Let's see what they want. I was wrong. They're not fuzz."

Shayne asked, "May we come in?"

"No," said the girl.

"But you are Debbie," said the detective.

"I'm Debbie. Who are you?"

Shayne introduced himself and Rourke.

"What do you want with Ralph?" she asked.

"I hear he left town about a year ago."

"That's right. Ralph and me didn't click. Once we thought we would, but we didn't."

"How come?"

The blue eyes measured him. "Shayne, you're not a stupid gook. You're looking for Ralph, that means you know a little something about him. You know he's a woman-hustler. I didn't mind the beach work at the hotel in the daylight hours,

understand? That was his job. But when it got to be all of those nights on Biscayne Bay—bull!

"I pointed him, and he went. With a green-eyed blonde from San Diego. But she must've gotten tired of him, or he tried to play twosies with her too. I guess he hit hard times. Anyway, about four or five months after he cut, I got a letter from him. He wanted money to come back here. If I'd had a million dollars stacked up on this living room floor I wouldn't have sent him a dime."

"How long ago did you get the letter, Debbie?"

"Two, three months ago. I don't remember. All I remember is, he was staying at a motel. If it helps you any, I do remember the name of the joint—the Lamplighter. How come you're looking for Ralph, Mr. Shayne?"

Shayne ignored the question. "When was the last time you heard from him?"

"I just told you. The letter I didn't answer. So I guess he got the message."

"You didn't hear from him, see him, last night, this morning?"

"Lord, is he back in town?"

"I have reason to think so."

The girl looked at the boy. "Trouble, Art."

"No trouble," he said confidently.

"Ralph might want to come around to see his child," Shayne suggested.

"Buddy isn't his kid," the girl said defiantly. "Buddy belongs to me'n Art. Which Ralph knows, incidently. Yeah, you should've seen his face when I told him, Mr. Shayne. He just about flipped out. He thought I was sitting here night after night watching television, I guess. It was a bomb, letting him know how wrong he was."

"So why do you think he might be trouble if he is in town?"

"He pesters," said the girl. "He's that kind."

"He won't show more'n once," said Art. "And he won't pester."

"Mr. Shayne, you still haven't said why you are looking for Ralph," the girl said.

He decided he didn't want to explain. He didn't want these two kids involved. He lied, "A woman is looking for him. She's heard he's back in town. She's retained me to find him."

"Does she want him cold or hot?" asked the girl.

"Cold," Shayne further lied.

"Then leave a phone number," said the girl. "If he shows, one of us will call you."

"One more question," said

Shayne. "Does Ralph have a family in town?"

"His parents are dead," said the girl. "He has a brother, Renfro, a fink. But he isn't around here, never has been to my knowledge. Last I knew he was in Las Vegas. But he could be dead by now too. He's that kind. Somebody has or will kill him. Everybody tires of roaches sooner or later."

"Debbie, thanks," said Shayne.

"For what?" said the girl, sounding as if she really wanted to know.

But Shayne was tracking. Melody Deans had lived and worked in Vegas. The previous night, at the Cassandra, she had been trailed or was accompanied by a kid named Ralph Bastone who had a brother who hung his trousers in Vegas.

Was it a tie?

In Shayne's convertible, Rourke said sagely, "I think Max Wallace is about to get a workout."

Lucy Hamilton was out to lunch when they returned to the office and Max Wallace was asleep in Las Vegas.

"What the hell," he grumbled in Shayne's ear, "we gotta rest sometime out here." He came awake fast as the Miami detective outlined what he wanted.

"Melody Deans, Renfro Bas-

tone, Flora Ann Perkins," Wallace repeated. "Those names aren't in lights, that much I can tell you already, friend. Okay, I'll see what I can smell out."

Shayne left numbers for a return call and then looked up a San Diego number in Lucy's special book of phone listings. Stan Smith operated a large investigative agency in San Diego and was a longtime contact. He greeted Shayne cheerily and then listened without interrupting as the detective outlined what he needed.

"It could be tough, Stan," Shayne said. "Bastone might've just been an overnight guest at this Lamplighter, and I can't give you an exact date when he was there. On the other hand, he could've been sleeping there semi-permanently. He asked for money to be sent there."

"I never heard of the place, Mike," Stan Smith said, "so it isn't one of the biggies out here. But if it still exists, and if they keep books, I'll have something for you by five, your time, this afternoon. You want me to call you or—"

"I'll be in touch, Stan. I've got some moving around to do."

"Now where?" Rourke asked as Shayne put the phone together.

"A cheese on rye and then

Gentry," said the redhead. "I'm hungry."

Will Gentry was stuffed with information. Albert Deans had checked out. He was what he said he was: a semi-retired Iowa farmer, living in Miami. The only mystery about him was his bank accounts. He seemed to have several.

"And speaking of bundles, Mike..."

Gentry sat back, let it hang as he chomped on the stub of his evil-smelling black cigar. His stare was flat, his heavy features sour.

"There are very interesting little stirrings around town," he said finally. "The informers are whispering among themselves. Word had drifted in that certain people in Las Vegas are hot. It seems your Melody Deans may have been carrying a bundle, \$500,000, and she got hit."

## VI

"SKIM MONEY?" Mike Shayne snapped.

Gentry shrugged, tilted the cigar stub.

"If Melody Deans was bringing in skim money, it could only have been going to one guy, Antonio Cicerone."

Antonio Cicerone built recreation areas from Florida to Texas. Antonio Cicerone gave handsomely to the United

Fund, the Heart Fund, and any other fund man might concoct. Antonio Cicerone was chairman of the board and president of Recreation Investment Corporation. Antonio Cicerone belonged to two country clubs, three tennis clubs, a boat club, and was square in the middle of the fight to preserve the Everglades.

Antonio Cicerone also was the biggest live mobster in all the southeast United States, headquarters: Miami.

"Painter's already tried to see him," Gentry said.

"And Antonio is out of town."

"Isn't he always?"

"But is he?"

Gentry shifted in his chair, wiggled the cigar stub. "No."

"On the other hand, Will, Antonio didn't hit her."

"That right? You never heard of the doublecross, huh?"

Shayne shook his head. "If she was pulling a run on him, why would she show here? She'd have cut straight for Madrid."

"Okay, so she was bringing the stuff in, somebody on the outside knew, and that somebody got to her."

Shayne continued to wag his head. "No good, either. Antonio would've had an army meeting her plane. Once the stuff was here, he'd take over. Thirty seconds inside Inter-

national terminal, and she'd be clean. Will, if Melody Deans was carrying skim money, it's original destination wasn't here."

"All I'm telling you is what I hear," Gentry said. He paused, then added, "Goddamnit, Mike, informers don't manufacture these things! There's half million involved!"

Shayne stod up.

"Where are you going?"

"To see my old friend, Antonio Cicerone. Where else?"

Gentry became busy with a stack of folders on his desk. But Shayne knew that while he was heading out of the police station, Gentry already was alerting his stakeouts at Recreation Investment Corporation.

Outside, Tim Rourke said, "Okay if I tag along, Mike?"

Shayne hesitated. "I might have more luck alone, Tim."

"Yeah. Okay, I'll buzz over and see our friend, Painter. Talk to you later."

The RIC Building stood tall and shiny in mid-afternoon sunshine, ten stories higher than any of the other gleaming high rises in the lush district of Miami. Steel and glass, with a penthouse on top, it had been constructed so that Antonio Cicerone could look down on people and things. Antonio liked stature.



TIM ROURKE

Shayne was familiar with the building. He'd been all the way to the top on a day when Antonio Cicerone had been squirming under the threat from kidnapers of having his grandson's heart delivered to him by U.S. Mail.

The gutty kidnapers had been hitting the mob, snatching a hood here and there, demanding and getting ransom cash. Then they'd snatched Cicerone's grandson and the Big Man had turned to the private eye for help. Shayne had delivered the boy intact and the kidnapers on a platter.

It was why he felt he had an in as he turned into the RIC

Building. No Cicerone heavy was going to tread on The Deliverer. They'd walk lightly.

He crossed the posh lobby on quick strides. Out of the corner of one eye he saw a neat young man in a three hundred dollar suit gently ease away from a tiny cigar counter blonde. Out of the corner of the other eye he saw a short young man, also immaculate in a three hundred dollar suit, leave a deep chair.

They met at the self-service elevator. The door slid open silently, allowed two chattering secretaries freedom. Shayne stepped into the elevator.

The two young men stepped in behind him. They faced the front in unison and Shayne punched the button for the penthouse floor. The elevator door slid shut. Neither of the young men reached for a button. Neither said anything as they stood slightly behind and flanked the redhead. The elevator whisked them skyward.

Shayne was acutely aware. He knew, for instance, that in the lobby two new young men had immediately replaced the ones who were riding with him. He knew that all around the building, at every entrance, other young men lolled and were being flashed the message: potential trouble going up in the elevator. But he also knew,

that none of the young men were armed. Hoods were gentlemen these days. Besides, Antonio Cicerone did not allow guns in his personal vicinity.

When the elevator stopped and the doors opened, he stepped into the plushness of a large foyer and also stopped. The move surprised the goons. The one on his right brushed him in stride and slid off. The other one managed to dance around him. They were where he could see each now and he took the .45 from his shoulder holster and dangled it from an index finger shoved through the trigger guard.

"I'm here to see Antonio," he said.

Neither young man moved. They ignored the gun. The one on his right said, "Mr. Cicerone is not in town, Mr. Shayne. He will not be for several days, perhaps weeks."

"Bull. Cicerone's here and I'm going to see him." He put the .45 away.

Neither young man flinched. The one on his left smiled.

"Mr. Shayne," he said politely, "perhaps you hear better on this side. Mr. Cicerone is not in town. The only reason you have been allowed this far is we like privacy, quiet. And please try to understand that you are at a distinct disadvantage, even with your weapon.

You might shoot one of us but the other will crush you. Actually, what he will do is twist and turn and bend you in so many opposite directions you'll split at the seams and spill blood and guts all over this nice carpeting. We are experts at karate. Shall we go down?"

"Out of my way, pal." The detective took a long step forward. A closed door in the opposite wall was his goal but he didn't get to take the second step. He suddenly was pinned.

"Tell Cicerone," he seethed, "I want to rap about a half million dollars."

"He has people who want to rap about a half mill every day, Mr. Shayne," said one of the young men, not even breathing hard.

Then Shayne was released abruptly.

"Look," said the guy on his right. The front suddenly was gone. He was plain hood now. "Cicerone ain't gonna see you nor nobody else. So just run along and get the hell out of our hair, huh? We ain't looking for trouble, but you're spoiling. Man, you're crazy, coming in here heavy. You know how the man is about cannons. So how come you do this kind of thing? Don't take time to answer. Just get the hell out. Okay?"

The detective took another

step. He was pinned again, and this time a fist slammed into his stomach, bending him slightly and forcing him to draw a breath. He attempted to flail with his arms. Neither moved. Then the .45 was snaked from its rig and the heel of a shoe cracked down on his toes. He snarled oaths and heaved.

"Gentlemen?"

The voice came out of nowhere. It stopped the action. Shayne looked around, didn't find Cicerone. He still was alone with the two goons in the foyer. The door in the opposite wall remained closed tight. One of the goons was hefting the .45 as if testing it for weight.

"Mr. Shayne," said Cicerone, "I'm not interested in a half million dollars."

His voice seemed to come out of the ceiling of the foyer. The detective looked for a speaker, saw paneling only.

"The hell you're not, Antonio," the redhead said.

"Mr. Shayne—"

"Was the dame on the run, Antonio?"

"I'm sorry," said Cicerone, "I don't have the vaguest notion about what you're talking. Please leave, quietly. I'm quite busy. Good afternoon."

"Cicerone, she was cutting with a half mill of Vegas money and somebody hit her! Not

you! I can figure that much. You're not going to hit anyone on your own doorstep, but—"

"Good afternoon, Shayne."

"That's it, friend," said the goon on the detective's right.

"Out," said the goon on his left.

They turned him, shoved him into the elevator. He came off the back wall with a snarl, whirled, crouched, steeled for either or both of them. His .45 was sailing toward him. He caught it reflexively. And then the elevator doors swished shut, and he was going down—alone.

The big detective hadn't touched a button.

Shayne crossed the lobby on angry strides. No one seemed to pay any particular attention to him, but he knew he was being watched closely. Outside in the sunshine, he stood for a few seconds on the sidewalk, ignoring the pedestrians he forced to curve around him.

He sucked several deep breaths. And then suddenly he snorted, shook his head and moved off toward the parked convertible. A seedy-looking guy abruptly matched strides with him.

"Gentry wants a report," he said as they walked along.

"Gentry had his damn report before I left his office," the redhead snapped.

"Figures," said the seedy.

looking character. He dropped away.

At his Flagler Street office, Lucy Hamilton said, "Michael, you're to call Leo Peterson in Detroit."

Shayne sailed his Panama toward an old-fashioned coat rack in the corner. The Panama settled on a hook as he went on into his inner office.

From Detroit, Leo Peterson told him, "Your man hit town, Mike. Had a car waiting for him, went straight to his insurance building and inside." Leo Peterson paused, then added. "He also went straight up to the roof and took off in a copter."

Shayne slammed a fist against the edge of his desk.

"And," said Peterson significantly, "he had a tail coming off the jet. But the guy got left shuffling his feet, just like my man."

Shayne wondered how Peter Painter felt at the moment. There was no doubt in the redhead's mind now that Painter had allowed Salvadore Aires to cut, put a tail on him, figuring Salvadore might lead him to some answers. But what answers? And to what questions?

And why was Salvadore Aires running?

"Okay, Pete."

"I can keep an eye on his house, Mike."

"Yeah, do that for a day or so, but I figure he's traveling. Probably over to Canada."

"Un-huh."

Shayne put the phone together, sat contemplating Salvadore Aires' behavior. He wished Salvadore had not run. He wished his friend had come to him. Had Salvadore, on previous trips to Miami, become acquainted with Ralph Bastone the Beach Boy? Had he hired Bastone for a kill, set up Melody Deans?

Shayne shook his head. It didn't sound like a Salvadore Aires operation. Sal wouldn't go with an amateur when there were plenty of pro killers around.

Shayne pondered Ralph Bastone. Where did he fit? Should he tip Painter about the kid? No. Let Painter find out about Ralph on his own. Hotel employees were alert people. One of them, sooner or later, would remember the kid who checked in immediately behind Melody Deans. In the meantime, Shayne decided, he needed time to pin down Salvadore. He hoped Aires never had heard of Ralph Bastone.

The detective glanced at his watch. Ten minutes before four. Too early to call Stan

Smith in San Diego. He'd said he'd call at five, Miami time. Still, maybe Stan had been lucky, had gotten a fast line on Ralph Bastone.

"Ralphie is a louse, Mike," Stan Smith said from San Diego. "A beautiful boy, but a louse."

"Who says?"

"Dame named Connie Norton. She owns the Lamplighter, operates it, lives there in a little pad behind the office. The Lamplighter is small, neat, inexpensive, off the beaten path. Connie is plump, shall we say, but also neat, inexpensive and divorced. She got the motel in the settlement about six years ago. She's forty-five or so, not attractive, not unattractive—but attracted. At the moment, to Ralph Bastone. Still, he's a lousy louse. That's a direct quote."

"Is Bastone out there?" Shayne asked in a sharp voice.

"Nope, but Connie is yearning. If he comes back, he'll get in the front door, even if he is a louse."

"How long's he been gone?"

"Left last Sunday. With three hundred bucks of Connie's reserve cash. She kept it in her pad for emergencies. It's gone now, along with Ralphie."

"She knows why he cut?"

"Not for sure, but she's got a hunch he's in Las Vegas, living

it up on her green. He got a call from Vegas last Saturday night. He was out at the time, had gone to the store to get a bottle—using some more of her money, naturally—and he got the call. She took a number from the operator, that's how she knows the call was from Vegas."

"She listen in on the return call?"

"Nope. Ralphie went across the street to a pay phone. Said it was private. She didn't think any more about it after he returned. Then Sunday she wakes up and he's gone from her bed and so was her reserve cash."

"How long has Ralphie been living there?"

"Several months. She can't remember how many."

"Have a job?"

"Nope. But occasionally he helped at the motel. Emptied waste baskets, carried out trash. Most of the time, though, he had to lay in the sun at the pool. He has this skin disease, you know. If he doesn't get plenty of sunshine on his skin, he breaks out in a rash."

"Okay, Stan."

"You want me to keep a stakeout on the joint, Mike?"

"Yeah, but I've got a hunch Ralph Bastone is wallowing in much greener pastures."

Like maybe a half million

dollars worth, Shayne thought as he put the phone together.

Las Vegas was the key. Should he hustle out there, start turning up rocks? He sat thumping the desk edge, thinking about Max Wallace. What had Wallace found out? He put in a call to Las Vegas. But Max Wallace wasn't anywhere near a phone.

He killed a frustrating evening. Lucy Hamilton fed him cognac and steak and taped music while occasionally admonishing his frustration. Mildly. Finally, Lucy sent him home, where he waited until midnight for the call from Wallace, then fell asleep in the chair. It was a few minutes after five Wednesday morning when the jangle of the phone jarred him awake.

"Forgive the hour, Shayne," Max Wallace said, "but I've been traveling all night and I'm pooped. Five minutes from now I'm going to be in the sack for the day."

"I've been waiting, pal," Shayne said.

"Hey, cool it, man. These are night people out here. Nobody stirs while the sun is up. At least, nobody you're interested in."

"What have you got?"

"Renfro Bastone isn't in town. Nobody's seen him for at least two days, so make it

Sunday or Monday he vanished. Of course, he could be dead on the desert. He's that kind, a scavenger. No one likes him, trusts him, or wants anything to do with him. He's strictly a cheapie. Nobody knows how he lives, people figure he probably holds up gas stations, convenience stores, that kind of thing, strictly a cheapie. And there's no tie between him and this Melody Deans—whose death, my friend, has some people shuffling sand."

"She was carrying skim money," Shayne grunted.

"Right on, man. How'd you know?"

"There's been noises on this end, too."

"Understand, Shayne, I wasn't told flat out that she was carrying, but all the signs point. She was a house hostess at the Trout, been there for years. She could've been doubling as a carrier, too. She made a lot of short trips out of town during a year's time. East, west, north and south. It could figure she was distributing the wealth, as they say."

"Is anybody figuring she was distributing a half million dollars among her own pockets?"

Max Wallace whistled. "Whee! I hadn't heard that much or that angle. No wonder there's shuffling."



"Could Bastone have been in on the operation?"

"Not from what I've heard."

"Could he have found out she was leaving town with a bundle?"

"Those are supersecret moves, Shayne. And like I told you, this Bastone is small stuff, desert bait."

"What about Flora Ann Perkins?"

"She was Melody Deans' best female pal, and she's all torn up about Melody's death."

By day, she's a receptionist in a law office. By night, she's engaged in the world's oldest—and one of the best paying—professions. Before you ask, no, Melody Deans was not a hooker. She merely was a friend of a hooker."

"Okay, Wallace, I'm coming out."

"I'm the best Indian guide in town, friend."

"You got an afternoon paper out there?"

"Yep."

"Got a column in it?"

"Yep."

"Can you still get something in this afternoon's column?"

"If I stay up another hour."

"Tell the people who I am and that I'm coming out to find Melody Deans' killer."

"Shayne, I think I'm going to like you."

"Hoods sweat too, pal."

## VII

LAS VEGAS was gritty.

"Couple more hours, after the sun goes down, it'll sparkle," Max Wallace promised Mike Shayne.

Wallace was swarthy, looked healthy at forty, even with a slight paunch and the black goatee. He had a good head of dark hair and very white teeth. He wore a diamond ring, a pink shirt open at the collar, dark

blue trousers, white shoes and a black and white checked sports coat. His eyes were bright.

"Did you announce me?" Shayne wanted to know.

Wallace handed him a folded newspaper as they left the air terminal. Shayne found himself to be the lead item in the column. After the roses were taken out, the item said that Michael Shayne, a famed Miami private detective, was coming to town to find the killer of Melody Deans, who had been a hostess at the Trout.

"It brought out a couple of natives, at least," Wallace grinned as they got into a dusty sedan. Wallace stuck a key in the ignition switch.

"See that guy up ahead, getting into the blue convert? His name is McKeever. He's a detective, a good one, respected. He wants you—and others—to know that he knows you're here. He probably will get around to talking to you, but right now he's your protector. He doesn't want someone gunning you down in a parking lot."

"How about the guy behind us?" Shayne wanted to know. "The heavy guy in the green suit. Is he the gunner? He trailed us out of the terminal, too."

Wallace started the sedan motor.

"I knew I was going to like you," he said. "Name's Benjie Rhodes. He's a two-timer in the Big Cell. Been out a year now, unemployed, but McKeever can't hang him for being a vag. Benjie pays cash for everything, lives quiet, won't even pick up a package of gum from a counter without a buck in his hand. He floats. You see him here, you see him there. Anytime of the day or night. Hangs around the Trout, but those there who count say he's just a customer, and nobody throws out customers these days."

"Straight, Wallace."

"He's a gun without a gun."

"Strong fingers, huh?"

"There's three or four buried people who might vouch for that, but, of course, they can't. Where do you want to go?"

"I need a room, and figure the Trout's as good a place as any."

Wallace grunted again and yanked at the goatee as he piloted the sedan. "Somehow I knew you were going to pick it, so I already tried. They're filled. All of the big places are."

"Did you try in my name?"

"No."

"So let me try in my name. I've got a hunch I'll be accommodated, especially since the management was considerate enough to send someone to the airport. Benjie Rhodes is

representing the management of the Trout, is he not, Wallace?"

"Ever consider moving to Vegas, Shayne?" Wallace grinned.

"From what I've seen so far, I won't. Is McKeever behind us?"

"He's beautiful. He's got Benjie between us."

The Trout was low-slung in front, high in back, polish, with a sense of vast airiness. Its neon and glass and fake flower beds glistened. Shayne was put in a suite that opened onto the patio of the second floor outdoor swimming pool.

Max Wallace stood at the huge sliding door, looking out on the patio. He shook his head. "If I didn't know better, Shayne, I'd say you were expected."

"You heard the man at the desk. I was fortunate. They'd just had a cancellation."

"I hope they can't say the same thing in the next couple of hours."

"Nice scenery out there?" Shayne asked.

"Skin is beautiful."

Shayne showered and shaved and changed clothing while Max Wallace admired flesh. Then they went to a small lounge off the lobby, where Shayne ordered a cognac while Wallace had a beer.

Shayne asked the bartender,

"Did you know Melody Deans?"

The bartender scooped Shayne's change from the bar. "Did I, Max?"

Wallace shrugged, "Did you, Eli?"

"She was a nice lady," Eli decided. "Too bad she got killed."

"Who'd kill her?" Shayne asked.

Eli stared at the redhead for a few seconds, then went to a telephone.

"Oh, brother," breathed Wallace, "you do know how to get action."

Shayne caught a reflection in a side mirror. "McKeever, the cop, just came in."

"This is a public bar and McKeever likes beer," Wallace said. "He's free to drink his beer here, but that doesn't mean he can roam this palace. You'd better ease off a little."

Eli returned. "Mr. Cordova would like to see you gentlemen," he said. "At your convenience, of course."

"Who's he?" Shayne wanted to know.

Eli ignored the question. "You know the way, Mr. Wallace?"

"I know the way, Eli."

Shayne drank his cognac and Wallace left the beer, then the redhead walked with Wallace out of the small lounge, across

the airy lobby and entered a long, carpeted corridor. Shayne looked over his shoulder. McKeever was nowhere to be seen!

There was a door at the end of the corridor. It opened as they approached and Shayne took in a nattily dressed man of fifty or so who was manicured and smiling.

"Max," he said.

"Julio."

"And this is Mr. Shayne from Miami, I assume. Welcome to Las Vegas, Mr. Shayne. Come in. I believe you are drinking cognac. You will find one poured." He pointed to a corner bar. "Another beer, Max?"

Julio Cordova was a smiler. He kept smiling as he faced Shayne head-on. "We have a mutual acquaintance in Miami, Mr. Shayne. I've known Anonio Cicerone for years. He is doing quite well in the recreation business, I understand."

"I assume Antonio also told you I don't live on double talk," Shayne said.

Cordova kept smiling. "Yes, he did say you are aggressive. You are a private detective, and you are currently seeking the killer of Melody Deans. I read that much in Max's column this afternoon, of course. Well, Mr. Shayne, how can I help you? Miss Deans was a valued

employee here. We liked her work. Frankly, we are quite upset with her death. She is going to be extremely difficult to replace."

"Carriers can be, I suppose."

Cordova's smile flickered, came back to full strength.

"And I don't imagine you're particularly happy about the disappearance of a half million bucks," Shayne added.

Cordova shook his head, pulled the lower half of his smile with fingertips. "Antonio mentioned you had some crazy notion about missing money, Mr. Shayne. Frankly, I'm puzzled."

"Somebody hit her, Cordova."

The smile remained, but his eyes hardened.

"I've got a hunch she was on the run with a big bundle, made a stop in Miami and got hit. How about you? What's your hunch?"

The smile finally disappeared. Cordova pulled at his lip thoughtfully. His eyes had turned brittle. He wasn't angry. Simply cold, like an exposed marble slab on a winter day. "You're talking riddles, Shayne. If you came out here looking for that kind of lead, you've wasted time. I can't help you."

"Ever hear of a dude named Renfro Bastone?"

A flicker of curiosity hit the

hard eyes. "The name is vaguely familiar, yes."

"He may have hit your princess."

Cordova went to the bar and poured tap water from a pitcher over ice cubes. He drank before he looked at the redhead. "Then your journey here really is to find Mr. Bastone. I wish I could help you, but I can't. I don't know the gentleman that well. Max there is your best source in town anyway. Max knows everyone."

Shayne walked the length of the room, turned around. "Cordova, let's set up a hypothetical case. Let's assume that someone out here wanted skim money delivered somewhere back East and that Melody Deans was supposed to make the delivery. We'll eliminate the possibility that Melody Deans had an idea of her own, was going to make a normal delivery. Okay, there's this guy Bastone, a punk. Could a punk get a line on such a delivery?"

"I doubt it," said Cordova. "I don't know about such things, of course, but—"

"So if Bastone hit the dame, it had to be for another reason," Shayne interrupted.

"Possibly." Cordova frowned in deep thought.

"You used her one too many times, didn't you, pal?"

Cordova stopped the glass

halfway to his lips. He stood like a statue. Then he said, carefully, "Shayne, if my employees choose to moonlight I couldn't care less—unless it interferes with their employment here, of course."

"Miss Deans made frequent plane trips, I'm told."

"She traveled some," Cordova nodded. "On her own time. She earned the time."

"Un-huh." Shayne yanked at his ear. "And I understand she lived in. I'd like to see her place."

"Miss Deans had accommodations here, that's true," Cordova nodded. "We do that with some of our employees as a part of the consideration. But as to seeing the apartment, I'm sorry, Mr. Shayne, it already has another occupant. Miss Dean's personal things were shipped to her family in Iowa yesterday."

"Was that before or after McKeever got a look?" Shayne snapped.

Cordova smiled, drank water. "Sargeant McKeever okayed the shipment."

Shayne snorted and looked at Max Wallace. The newspaperman was stonewashed, the goatee jutting slightly.

Shayne said, "See the both of you," and walked out.

Wallace caught up with him on the sidewalk. "Hey?"

The town was bright now,

flashing lights beckoning the suckers, and they were out, crowding the sidewalks. Shayne ignored both the lights and the suckers.

"How come you didn't tell me McKeever is on their payroll, pal?"

"McKeever isn't," Wallace said bluntly. "He's the straightest cop we've got."

"Yeah?"

"You have to trust somebody, Shayne," Wallace said, sounding sour. "You're in strange territory. I'm telling you McKeever is straight like the good arrow."

Shayne looked around. He didn't like the tinsel or the smell of Las Vegas. He wasn't even sure he liked Wallace.

"Where do I find Flora Ann Perkins?" he growled.

"We drive there. She's got a place on the edge of town. You want to tell me about her, where she fits?"

"No."

"Okay. I just thought I might be entitled."

They got into the car. Wallace wheeled out of the hotel parking lot. Shayne sat low in the seat and glowered without seeing anything. He felt as if he was running in deep water. He wasn't getting anywhere.

Then Wallace said, "You're an impatient bastard, Shayne.

You've been in town—what? A few hours. You're acting like you should have this thing all wrapped up and be heading back to Miami. Man, what did you expect out of a smoothie like Cordova? The platter?"

Shayne slid the newspaperman an oblique look.

"We're not cowboys out here. Big city private detectives don't awe us. We've seen 'em before, and we'll see 'em again. Incidentally, we've got a tail. It's probably McKeever, but we could have Benjie Rhodes, too. I doubt if I can shake him. I'm no expert at this sort of thing."

Shayne said, "I'd be expected to visit Flora Ann Perkins sooner or later. She and Melody Deans were pals."

Flora Ann Perkins lived in the first floor middle of a squat apartment building. She did not answer the summons produced by Shayne's thumb against a small door button. He rapped hard. The door remained closed. The only sounds were muted voices that came from behind the door.

"Sounds like a television program," Wallace said. He paused, then added. "She could be working." He shot Shayne a side glance.

The redhead scowled. A crawly feeling in his gut made him shift his feet and open his coat so that he had quick access



to the holstered .45. The last time he'd experienced the same feeling Melody Deans had come crashing down almost on top of him from a seventeenth floor hotel balcony.

"Something stinks," Shayne said.

Wallace stroked his goatee and looked around. "What makes you say that?"

Shayne tried the door knob. It didn't turn. "Let's hustle a manager. I want to see inside."

"Hey, hold it a sec," Wallace said. "Flora Ann might not want to be disturbed. She could be—"

Shayne found the manager in a front apartment. He was a young guy with long sideburns and a bushy mustache. He

wasn't interested in opening Flora Ann Perkins' apartment until Shayne edged back his coat and allowed him a glimpse of the holstered gun.

"Okay, okay," he said.

He picked up a large ring of keys from a table near the door and went ahead of Shayne and Wallace down the corridor. At Flora Ann Perkins' door, he said, "I'm going to open up, and then I'm going to fade, okay? I've got no beef with anyone."

Shayne smelled death the instant the door swung open. He also heard the sound of shower water above the television voices.

He pounded into the small bath. The shower curtain was closed. He swept it aside and looked down on the naked crumpled figure of the woman who was curled in the bottom of the bathtub, luke warm shower water splattering her hip.

"If you figure McKeever is waiting outside, get him," the redhead snapped.

## VIII

McKEEVER was a lanky, loose-jointed man, coldly efficient. He called in help, supervised the preliminary investigation and then talked to the building manager before

finally motioning Mike Shayne and Max Wallace outside. They stood at an unmarked police sedan under a street lamp light.

McKeever looked down the street. "Benjie's still with us, I see," he said.

Shayne spotted the car braked at the curbing about a block away as Wallace said, "She was strangled, McKeever."

The cop shook his head. "Benjie's been on you two since Shayne got to town. He didn't kill her. Right now I have to figure it was some john." He shrugged. "Which isn't too unusual. Johns get angry, hustlers get killed. It's mostly always like that."

"Crumford, the manager, says she came in alone around five-thirty this afternoon. He knows because he was working out back in the parking lot when she drove in. She parked her VW, spoke to him, and went inside to her apartment. She didn't leave again in her car. He knows that too because he was working out there in the lot until about twenty minutes before you two showed at his apartment. So right now I have to figure some john came to her place early this evening, probably some client she hustled at the law office. She worked for a law firm by day. I'll check out the office in the morning."

"McKeever," Shayne said

flatly, "you know why I'm in town?"

"I'd have to be blind not to. Everybody in Las Vegas reads Max Wallace. I had a call from a detective named Painter this morning. Among other things, he said there was the possibility you'd show."

"Did Painter give you Flora Ann Perkins?"

"The passport and airline ticket business? Yes, it was the main reason he called."

"So you can write her murder off to a john? You can't tie it to—"

McKeever sounded as if he was thinning on patience, as he said, "I'm not writing off anything. There damn well might be a tie between the death of Melody Deans and what you just discovered. But the killing here could be a simple thing, too, and totally unrelated. It could be a john killed her. I have to consider that."

"So consider it, then forget it. This woman was killed because she knew something about Melody Deans!"

"Maybe." McKeever shrugged.

"You know a character named Renfro Bastone?"

McKeever fixed Shayne with a hard look. "We talk to him every so often, yeah, pull him in for questioning. About a

stickup here, a stickup there. What about him?"

"Is he in town right now?"

"No," McKeever said slowly, frowning.

"Know where he is?"

"He still could be down your way, I suppose. Miami, Miami Beach . . ."

McKeever let it hang and Shayne pressed. He knew he had the cop thinking in the right direction now. "You figure Bastone could've known Melody Deans was carrying a half million, trailed her, hit her?"

"It's a possibility, I suppose."

"What's more probable?"

"That he was sent after her."

"By whom?"

"By somebody who has a beef with Cordova, or by somebody in the know who is greedy."

"Any ideas?"

"The beef doesn't fit, as far as I know. Things have been quiet here, nobody angry with anybody else. But the greed, now that could fit. We have plenty of greedy people around."

Shayne said, "I get the picture that Bastone is a cheap punk, not trustworthy. Who'd take a chance on him in a half million dollar caper?"

McKeever waved a hand. "Bastone isn't known for

smarts, that's true. But somebody could've talked him into the deal with a promise of a few thousand, then killed him at the time of the payoff."

"You figure Bastone is dead?"

"He could be."

"Know anything about his brother?"

"I didn't know he had a brother," McKeever said slowly.

"He does. Okay, if Bastone is still walking, could he have slipped in here today, and killed the Perkins woman? The passport and the air ticket made out in the name of Flora Ann Perkins could have scared him. No smarts again. He spots both, knows something isn't right, becomes confused, then scared. He doesn't understand the Perkins woman's role in all of this so he heads back here and strangles her."

"Maybe," McKeever said, tugging his lower lip in thought. "But I'm more inclined to think that Bastone pulled off the heist, then told his silent partner about the passport and ticket. Partner kills Bastone, takes the haul, returns here, hits the woman."

"Okay, who are the candidates?"

McKeever looked almost startled. Then he permitted himself a tight smile. "Shayne, you've got to be kidding. This

town is loaded with greedy characters."

"But how many would know Melody Deans was being sent on a journey with that kind of bread?"

McKeever moved. He went around the front end of the sedan and got inside. He stuck a key in the ignition switch. Shayne hung in the open door window. McKeever said, "Get a good night's sleep, Shayne. I'll be in touch."

He started the motor and drove away.

Shayne watched the tail-lights disappear and then rejoined Max Wallace on the sidewalk.

"I don't like the way your friend operates," he snapped. "But at least he's forgot that assinine theory about a john."

Wallace dropped the redhead at the Trout.

"It's been an interesting evening," he said. "And I've got work to do."

"Give me some names, Wallace," Shayne said. "Who's McKeever going after?"

"Shayne, this town exists on greed. Your best bet is to do as McKeever says: get a good night's sleep while he singles out the few possibilities. Tomorrow, maybe, you can do your thing. McKeever will play ball. He's not allergic to assistance. It's what makes him

a good cop. The fifty cent advice is: let him get things rolling. He can do more eliminating overnight than you could do in a year of tromping."

But Shayne tromped. Back and forth in his room, with cognac and ice water in hand. Occasionally he went to the closed drapes, swept them aside and stared out on the late swimmers. The swimmers paid no attention to him. But in the back of his mind he wondered if Benji Rhodes was out there somewhere around the pool, keeping an eye on things, so to speak.

He also wondered if the Bastone brothers had been found by now and were they dead, as McKeever had theorized. Or were they in the Miami area? Should he call Painter, Gentry?

A sudden flash hit him. He stopped pacing, scowled against the remote possibility it offered. He used the thumb and forefinger of his right hand to tug at the lobe of his left ear.

He'd been around for a long time. He'd been up against all kinds of people, their incentives, their drives, their lusts. He had learned to expect anything from anybody. Still, this possibility was difficult to accept. It existed, okay, but perhaps it was a mere product

of his frustration, the need to get his teeth into something solid.

He shook his head, resumed his pacing. But he couldn't get the possibility out of his skull. Hell, there was one way to ripen or kill it. He placed a call to Peter Painter in Miami Beach. Painter was out of touch. Some nut had thrown a gasoline bomb in the front door of a nightclub. Painter was at the scene.

He tried to find Will Gentry with no luck. Gentry had a possible kidnaping on his hands. He was out beating bushes.

He phoned Lucy Hamilton, but before he could ask anything she exclaimed, "Michael, Stan Smith has been phoning from San Diego since late this afternoon! You're to call him!"

Stan Smith said, "I think you've got action at the Lamplighter, friend. I think Ralphie is back in town."

"Think?"

"I kept a man out there. Two guys showed shortly after noon, one younger than the other, each with a single suitcase. They hit the office, then Connie Norton came out with them and they cut together in her car. My man trailed them. They went to another motel, place called Weaver's, about the same

caliber as Connie's layout. The two guys checked in, and she hightailed it back to her establishment. Then the young guy showed at the Lamplighter again. He arrived alone in a cab; no suitcase this time. He went into the office and didn't come out. From the description of Ralphie I got from Connie earlier, I'd say the kid has returned. Her pad is behind the office, remember."

"It's important, Stan."

"Ralph Bastone is here, Mike. I'll pay your fare out if it isn't him."

San Diego in early morning, orange-gray light made Mike Shayne think of Miami. Stan Smith took him from the air terminal to the Lamplighter in a shiny New Lincoln Continental. In the drive-in slot in front of the office, he said, "Ralphie's here. The other guy's about four miles down the street at Weaver's. I've got two boys working now, Mike. One is watching us at this moment, the other is parked outside Weaver's."

"Keep the Weaver man," Shayne said. "But tip him. This one can go home."

"And me?" Stan Smith said with a crooked grin as Shayne vacated the Continental.

"You finally got married?"

The grin widened. "Naw, but I've got a girl friend."

"Tell her to send the statement to Miami."

"Natch."

Inside the Lamplighter office, Shayne banged the desk bell several times, then positioned himself at the door behind the desk. The door was yanked open by a voluptuous, dark-haired woman who carried a few ounces of extra weight here and there but still could boast of a good figure. She was barefooted. She had thrown on a negligee and she held it together with one hand as she stared in amazement at Shayne.

"Mister, you've got a lot of guts! This is private back here! You want a unit, I'll come out and—"

The redhead pushed her aside and shot past her. He stomped across a small living room and went through an open door into a tiny bedroom as Connie Norton screeched. "Ralphie—"

The kid came off the foot of the rumpled bed. He wore blue boxer shorts, nothing more. He was wide-eyed and trim with long hair. He also looked frightened as he leaped at Shayne.

The detective stepped aside and slammed a long arm against Ralph Bastone, bringing the arm around in a backhanded sweep. The blow sent the boy reeling off balance.

Shayne heard another screech. It was a warning. He doubled forward and jammed back his elbows, keeping his arms tight against his sides. Connie gasped when she landed on the elbow points.

The redhead straightened with a snap and jammed with the elbows. The move freed him. When he whirled, he saw Connie peeling back, her face screwed up in a combination of pain and surprise. She sat down hard on the bed, bounced.

Ralph was coming in again from the side, low and off-balance, face contorted. Shayne caught his long hair and flipped him on across the room. Ralph banged into a wall. When he came around, a leg buckled. He went down on one knee. Shayne stood over him, the muzzle of the .45 against the boy's forehead. The boy became frozen and behind the detective Connie gasped in a broken voice: "God, don't kill him!"

Shayne snarled, "Tell me about Miami Beach, Ralph!"

Ralph crumbled. "All we wanted was her jewels, her money. Ren figured she'd be heavy. But we didn't get a dime! She was there on the floor, out cold, and the place stunk. Then..."

"Then?" Shayne pressed.

Ralph took a couple of



seconds, and Shayne knew that whatever came next was to be a lie. Ralph was struggling with his thoughts, seeking an out. He reverted, as most liars do: "Look man, Ren had this dame staked out in Vegas. He found out she was leaving town on a little vacation. He found out she was going to Philly, I don't know how. He called me in to trail her because she'd know him if she spotted him. She took a Philly plane, but she changed in Kansas City, headed down to Miami. Ren was already in Philly, waiting for me to call when I hit town. He had a helluva time getting down to Miami so fast, but he made it. And all we wanted was her

green, her jewels. Ren had it figured no dame would travel without money, jewels.

"Anyway, I got her room number at that hotel, we waited a little while to let her get to sleep. That was our plan. We were going to hit her while she was asleep. Not hurt her, just knock her out, then clean out the joint. The only trouble was somebody'd already been there. We couldn't believe it when we hit her room, but she'd already been cleaned! All we got was a diamond thing off her wrist, then we cut, but Ren didn't want to go straight back to Vegas for some reason. So we came here. I figured Connie would put us up for a few days."

"Ralph," Shayne said coldly, pressing the .45 tighter against the boy's forehead, "where's the half million? You aren't stupid enough to let your brother keep it down there alone in the other motel, are you? He'll be gone quicker than—"

"What the hell you talking about, man?"

"The half million bucks you two lifted from Melody Deans."

"You're putting me on!"

"Am I?"

The boy looked confused. He breathed harshly. "Man, if we'd lifted half a million you think I'd be here?"

"I figure you're not too heavy on the smarts, Ralph." Shayne grunted, eased up with the .45 slightly, but he kept the muzzle about an inch from the boy's left eye. "You said you found Melody Deans out cold on the carpeting."

"Yeah! And the place stunk!"

"Chloroform?"

The boy looked confused again. "I don't know. What's chloroform smell like?"

Shayne ignored the question. "How'd you two get inside, Ralph?"

"Well, Ren has these tools. I don't know what you call them, but they work in door locks. Only we didn't need them. The door wasn't locked!"

"Un-huh. Okay, you're inside and you find a passport, an airline ticket, and—"

"We didn't find nothing like that, man!"

"But Melody Deans came awake while you were there?" It was a question.

Ralph's eyes jumped, lighted up for a moment, then died.

"Y-yeah," he said.

He suddenly sounded very frightened again, and the redhead plunged, "You two threw her from the balcony because she recognized your brother."

Ralph clamped his lips, remained silent, but he

wouldn't look at the detective now. He began to quiver.

"Ralphie?" Connie said from somewhere behind Shayne. Her voice was soft, held a pleading note. "Tell him you didn't do it."

"Shut up!" the boy screamed.

Shayne holstered the .45 and caught a handful of Ralph's long hair, yanked him up on his feet.

"Melody Deans recognized your brother," he repeated in a voice that grated, "and he panicked. He knew she had tough friends in Vegas. He knew he could end up in a desert grave if she said the right word to the right people. What he didn't know was that she was on the run and was going underground."

Ralph looked totally confused.

Connie moved around Shayne, put herself between the boy and the detective. She took Ralph's face in her hands, tilted up his head. "You're in trouble, lover," she said. "Big, bad trouble. But I'll pick up the pieces, put you back together again—if you'll let me."

He broke. He sagged. "Connie-baby," he said, grasping her biceps, "help me."

"You turn in your brother to this cop," she said.

"I'm not a cop," said Shayne.

Connie Norton turned slowly, stared hard at him. Her eyes danced to the coat bulge.

"Then you're going to have to kill the both of us," she said.

"But I'm going to call the cops," the detective said.

The police listened, rousted Renfro Bastone from his motel room, then took everyone to headquarters, where a call was placed to Peter Painter in Miami Beach.

"Let me talk to Painter," Shayne said. "I can explain it quicker."

Painter snarled, "And just who the hell are these Bastone brothers, Shayne? I never heard of them!"

Shayne grunted. "You got a smell on the money, Painter?"

Painter snorted. "Tell me what area of Canada your friend Salvadore Aires might disappear in, and I'll have a smell!"

"Letting Sal leave town was dumb," Shayne said. "But he wasn't carrying treasure. He's got his own treasure chest, and it's loaded."

"Nobody," Painter seethed, "would walk away from a cool half million dollars, Shayne."

"And anybody could be attracted by it," the detective countered. Then he said, "Okay, Painter, here's a cop."

Tell him what you want done with the Bastones, I'll be seeing you—unfortunately."

"Shayne . . ."

He heard the yell as he passed the phone to a detective. He ignored it.

## IX

IT WAS early Thursday evening when his plane put down in Las Vegas. He found Max Wallace at the newspaper office.

"Little early for you to be out of bed, isn't it, Wallace?" he said.

The newspaperman cocked an eyebrow, pulled the goatee in a moment of silent contemplation, then said, "You're testy, friend."

Shayne shuffled. He felt out of sorts with the world.

"The Bastone brothers are in jail in San Diego," he growled.

"That right?" Wallace said, cocking an eyebrow.

Shayne reviewed the arrests. Wallace listened. Then the newspaperman said, "Okay, the Bastones are in jail. But it doesn't finish it, does it? You're still hot. What's the pitch?"

"There's a missing half million dollars, a dead woman here neither of the Bastones killed, and I've got a friend who is in trouble."

Wallace nodded thoughtfully, sat back in the chair

behind the typewriter. "Well, we've had an interesting little tidbit turn up here too. Flora Ann Perkins left an estate. One of McKeever's men turned up a checkbook and a tin box in her apartment. The checkbook showed a balance of \$3,150. Inside the tin box was \$2,500 in cash, a savings deposit book showing \$49,700 in an account—and a will. If the will stands up, the single beneficiary is one Harold Wilson McKeever, cop-detective."

Shayne grunted, his thoughts whirling. He grabbed the lobe of his left ear with the fingers of his right hand.

"Who's McKeever's superior?" he asked bluntly. "What kind of cop is he?"

Wallace lifted an eyebrow again. "Chief Amster, and he's A-1. A tough man. Why?"

"Are he and McKeever pals?"

"They're both long-timers here. Cops come, cops go. Not Amster and McKeever."

"But are they pals?"

Wallace frowned. "Outside the station?" He hesitated. "I'd say no. They work together like meshed gears, but off-duty... well, Amster is married, got a batch of kids. He's got his home life while McKeever, a bachelor—well, hell, Shayne, they don't roam in the same circles, you know what I mean?"



"McKeever roamed with Flora Ann Perkins, huh?"

"Christ, nobody can figure that one! I mean it's a surprise! McKeever, the cop, and Flora Ann, the hustler! What the hell, it's—"

"What's McKeever saying?"

"Nothing! He's clammed. Aw, he's probably laid it out for Amster, but—"

"I want him," Shayne said, standing abruptly.

Wallace looked up. He sat without moving. His eyes were bright and filled with questions.

But all he said was, "You came back here, Shayne, to get somebody. You came into this office a few minutes ago, sniffing and quivering like a hound dog on the track of a strong scent. What I want to know is where did you pick up that scent, and what the hell is that scent?"

"I picked it up right here, pal, last night. McKeever knew Renfro Bastone had been in Miami Beach. At first, I figured Painter, the detective on the case down there, had told him. McKeever said he had had a call from Painter. With Bastone being from here; it seemed natural that Painter would bring up the guy. But later I remembered that there was a helluva strong chance Painter didn't know about Renfro Bastone. I got tipped to his brother, Ralph, by a money-hungry beach boy, one of these kids who doesn't volunteer anything unless there's a buck in it. It didn't figure the kid had gone to Painter. Cops don't pay. Still, there was a chance he had."

"So I tried to get Painter on the phone, couldn't. Then I got sidetracked by the Bastones showing in San Diego. Finally, after rounding up the brothers, I did talk to Painter—and he'd never heard of either of them! So how did McKeever know

Renfro Bastone was in Miami Beach? Maybe he was down there, huh? Spotted Bastone? And if he was down there Monday night, early Tuesday morning, how come?"

Wallace used the telephone on his desk, dialed a number, then said, "Bryant? Hi. Max Wallace here. Hey, is McKeever around? Naw, I don't want him. But check the duty roster for me, will you? I need to know what days off he has. Some guys are planning a little surprise bash for him next week."

Wallace waited, drumming fingernails against the typewriter, then said, "Wednesday and Thursday next week? Let's see, you boys are on a rotation schedule. That'd mean he had Tuesday and Wednesday off this week, right?"

The newspaperman listened, frowned. The frown became a scowl.

"Okay, Bryant, thanks." He put the phone together, looked up at Shayne. "McKeever traded out days off this week so he could have Monday and Tuesday. I don't like this, Shayne. Not one goddamn little bit, but McKeever could have been in Florida, Monday night and back here sometime Tuesday. What's it mean?"

"McKeever is at headquarters?"

"Yes, of course."

"See you."

"See, hell. This is my bailiwick."

McKeever was alone in an office cubicle off the squadroom. There was a desk and two straightback chairs in front of the desk. Nothing on the walls. McKeever sat behind the desk, munching half of a sandwich. The other half remained in an open wax wrapper on the desk. Beside it was a small carton of milk. His face showed nothing, but his eyes were wary as he looked up at Shayne and Wallace. He looked like he didn't want to be disturbed.

Shayne plunged. "You want to take me to the half million or do we play cat and mouse games, McKeever?"

The cop sat like stone for a second, the sandwich halfway to his mouth. Then he put down the sandwich slowly and sat back in his chair. Shayne watched where he kept his hands. He wanted the drop if McKeever decided to go for a weapon.

McKeever said finally, "Painter told me you could be a wild man."

"But he didn't tell you about the Bastone brothers, Renfro Bastone in particular. He didn't know about them until this afternoon. So how the

hell did you know Renfro was in Miami Beach earlier this week?"

McKeever took a few seconds, eyes narrowed. "Shayne, it's my business to know about guys like Bastone, where they are at all times."

It was possible; McKeever could be that kind of cop. But Shayne refused to accept that possibility. Somebody in Las Vegas had killed Flora Ann Perkins, somebody with a strong motive.

McKeever said. "Lay it out for me, Shayne," in a voice that had ice on the edges. "Just how you think it is."

Smart, Shayne thought. Lay it out, expose his thinking, his theories, his speculations. McKeever was smart, a man who had listened to thousands of explanations. You listen to the explanations and then you have its holes and you rip it apart at the seams.

"I will, pal," Shayne said in a hard voice, "to your chief. Wallace, get Amster in here. If he isn't in the building, find him."

"Hold it, Max," McKeever said sharply. He stood behind the desk, looked straight at Shayne. "Let me see if I have this straight. We've all heard the rumors that Melody Deans was carrying a half million dollars in skim money. Shayne, are you

saying that I now have that half million?"

"I'm saying."

"I see." He came around the desk. Shayne was alert, waiting for a fast move. But McKeever remained at a distance. "All right, Mr. Shayne, where do I have it?"

"Wherever you live."

McKeever lifted an eyebrow slightly. His eyes were brittle. "Not buried in the desert and not put away in a safety deposit box?"

"It's possible to get a court order to look in a bank box," Shayne said, "and I don't think you'd take that chance with a half million. You aren't going to bury it in the desert, either. A half mill is too much. You'd be going out to the burial grounds every five minutes, checking. Winds play tricks with sand. But more important, I figure you're planning to fly, McKeever. I figure you've got it mapped out to sit around for a few weeks, maybe a couple of months or so, then resign for one concocted reason or another and vanish with the bread."

McKeever nodded. "As Painter said, you are wild, Mr. Shayne. I live in a duplex. Shall we go? You may look all night, if you wish."

"I've got all kinds of time, pal."

"You drive, Max," McKeever said.

Outside, McKeever got into the front seat beside Wallace. Shayne sat in back. McKeever looked straight ahead, didn't twist a muscle. Shayne frowned. Was he wrong about this dude? He'd expected McKeever to make a break once they were outside the station. McKeever had stopped Wallace before the newspaperman could summon Chief Amster.

The duplex was in a quiet neighborhood. Both sides of the squat house looked empty. The doors were closed, drapes were drawn, and there was nobody in the yard.

"I live on the right side, Wallace," McKeever said.

Wallace braked at the curbing <sup>now</sup> out front. Shayne saw a two-year blue convertible in the drive next to the right unit of the duplex. McKeever used a key to open the front door. "My landlord lives next door, but he's gone down to Mexico."

McKeever entered, and Shayne saw the movement of the cop-detective's right arm. He slammed Wallace out of his path and shot his palms against McKeever's spine, sending him stumbling across the room.

McKeever crashed against a table, knocking a lamp to the carpeting, but he spun as he went down and there was a gun

in his hand. Shayne lashed out with his foot, the toe of his shoe driving the gun hand up. He caught the gun in both hands and twisted savagely, wrenching the weapon from McKeever's hand.

McKeever sagged against the carpeting. He lay breathing hard for a long time, staring at nothing. Finally, Wallace whispered, "Hey, what the hell . . . ?"

"The money is here," Shayne said. "We were next to being dead men, Wallace. All he had to do was get away from the station, lure us here, kill us and vanish in that car outside. Do I kick it out of you, McKeever, or do you talk?"

It all had started with Melody Deans, who was planning to leave the country. She had needed a passport, and to get the passport, she had needed a birth certificate. But Melody had wanted to leave the country under another name. So she had gone to her friend, Flora Ann Perkins, told Flora Ann she was running from some man from Detroit. She wanted to disappear for awhile, but she had to go under another name so the man couldn't follow her. She even had laid out travel plans: purchase an air ticket to Philadelphia, then switch flights enroute, fly to Miami, then to Copenhagen, the maneuvering

to throw off the man in case he should try to follow her.

Flora Ann had bought it. Confiding women understood those kind of things. But Flora Ann also could not keep a secret. She had to tell someone. She had told Harold Wilson McKeever, clandestine cop-lover, who, being a cop, was immediately suspicious. It did not seem to Harold Wilson McKeever that a woman needed to lay such elaborate plans to rid herself of an unwanted suitor.

Melody Deans always had been a suspected carrier of skim money. Could it be that this time out she wanted to obtain a passport under another name so that she could journey to Copenhagen with a bagful of stolen loot?

McKeever arranged his days off duty so he could be inside Miami's International air terminal when Melody Deans arrived. Surprise! Inside the terminal, McKeever spots a Vegas creep he recognizes—and who would recognize him.

McKeever stays out of sight but keeps Renfro Bastone in range. Then, second surprise. When Melody Deans arrives and marches out of the terminal, Bastone is moving along behind her. Bastone is a shadow, maybe a second shadow. There's a kid up front who

seems to be trailing Melody Deans too.

It's all screwy as hell, and it almost forces McKeever to pull in his horns, turn back, but at this splashy hotel in Miami Beach, the shadows go one way while Melody Deans goes another. McKeever takes off after Melody Deans' luggage. Bellboy makes his deposit, comes out of suite, checking door to be sure it is locked, disappears.

McKeever slithers to door. It's no sweat. He's got keys to open almost any door. But inside he's frustrated. He can't find money. Only two suitcases that produce clothing, a passport and an airline ticket to Madrid, Spain. Madrid? Not Copenhagen? But it could figure. A confiding woman might have lied if she didn't want her friend to know her true destination.

And then there's the sound of a key in the door lock. Again no sweat, for McKeever had come prepared. In the beginning, he had figured on allowing Melody Deans to retire, then sliding into her room and slapping a chloroform patch on her face. Now he scrambles behind the door, pouring chloroform on the run, and he smacks the patch against her face the instant she is inside the suite.

-Then he gets lucky and discovers money in a bag purse. Rolls of money. All in denominations he's never seen before. McKeever cuts with loot, returns to Las Vegas. He's bothered by the fact that Renfro Bastone seemed to have been tailing Melody Deans too. What did it mean? McKeever is nervous. Was Bastone dangerous to him? If Bastone returned to Vegas cop might have to do something about him.

But an even more disturbing thing happens. Melody Deans is killed in Miami Beach. And suddenly there are police and private investigations. Somebody, police or private eye, is going to get to Flora Ann Perkins. Flora Ann must be silenced and is.

The only trouble is, Flora Ann leaves a ghost to haunt. She leaves a will. Who would think a hooker would leave a will? On the other hand, it figured. By day, the hooker worked for a law firm; she would be aware of the value of wills. But damn Flora Ann Perkins. She had pointed a finger from her death bed, placed McKeever in a precarious position. And he had been sweating. He had been sitting in his little cubicle at police headquarters, munching a sandwich without tasting it, trying to figure when and where to

run with a half million dollars when more trouble had walked in.

McKeever eyed Shayne and Wallace. A sudden glimmer of hope appeared in his eyes. "A three-way split of a half million bucks wouldn't be too bad."

But all McKeever saw was stony stares. The glimmer blinked out.

A chief of police and a called-in IRS man took McKeever. Shayne took a jet. He slept all the way to Miami, where Lucy Hamilton was waiting for him inside International Airport.

There was a certain set to Lucy's greeting smile, a certain glisten in her eyes, a certain grip of her hand on his bicep as they walked that alerted Shayne.

"Okay, Angel, spill," Shayne said.

"I have a surprise for you."  
"I know."

"Salvadore is waiting in the car in the parking lot."

Salvadore Aires shook Shayne's hand perfunctorily. He looked grim. "I've got to get this off my mind, Mike."

"Shoot, pal."

"Melody Deans and I had a thing going. I wanted to marry her, but she said nix. I'd already had five wives, which wasn't much of a recommendation for marriage. But she'd take a trip with me. She wanted to see

Madrid. We could spend a few days, weeks, months, however it worked out. I said, 'Hell, yes, why not?' So we planned to meet here, go on together, except—"

"She showed up with a half million dollars," Shayne finished for him. "She laid it all out for you at the party."

"I couldn't believe it, Mike. For the first time in my life I wasn't sure how to handle something. We finally agreed to wait until morning, hash it over again. I wanted time to think. Somehow I had to separate Melody from that money, the people associated with it."

"Then she was killed."

"They didn't have to kill her, Mike," he said, sounding as if he was in a well. "They were going to get their money returned. But they were too quick for me and when—when I saw her dead on the sidewalk, smashed the way she was, I

panicked. I felt sure they either knew about me or would find out. I ran. Some people—you, for instance—might not be frightened by the thought of having mobsters eyeing you. I am."

"They didn't kill her, Sal."

"Then who did?" He sounded totally mystified.

Shayne lighted a cigarette and went over the entire case. He'd have to do this, at least in part, three more times, once for Painter, once for Albert Deans, and once for Gentry. But Salvadore Aires seemed entitled too.

When he had finished, Salvadore breathed, "God, a couple of punks..." It was all he said.

"If it hadn't been Bastone, it would've been somebody else, eventually. Melody Deans made her death bed the second she made her turn from Philadelphia to Miami Beach."



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# THE NAME OF THE GAME IS TAPE



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*The best part of the caper was, nobody would ever know. Nobody, that is, but a very curious cop with an idea.*

---

by

DAN J. MARLOWE

**B**Road-shouldered Carl Robey, detective sergeant of the Midland police force, shifted position uneasily on the roll of canvas in the storage room of the huge, semi-darkened supermarket.

"This is crazy!" he rasped to his detective partner, James Thompson. "Three nights you've had me in here for nothing now. This stakeout is a joke. Wherever you're getting your information from, it's all wet."

Thompson, younger and slimmer, frowned in the darkness.

"Hold on a little longer, Carl," he said softly. "I know I'm right about this. I have everything but the date. They'll be along."

Robey's snort was distinctly audible. "You won't get me in here another night, Jimmy," he warned. "This is slower going than sitting in your apartment watching you add sound on sound to a pre-recorded tape. You know I don't have the patience—" He broke off abruptly as a whirring noise made itself heard above the sound of his voice. He surged up to his knees, his big

hand dropping on his partner's shoulder and tightening.

"Diamond cutter on glass," he breathed. "You were right, Jimmy. They're coming through the side window. I'll cover the front." Moving with a speed surprising in a man of his bulk, he disappeared into the shadow of the store aisles, a bulldog flashlight in his left hand and a .38 police special held firmly in his right.

Thompson remained flat on the canvas, alert for the revealing tinkle of the removed square of glass. It was followed by the rasp of the catch being slipped off, and the squeak of the opening window. A series of grunts indicated the progress of the first man through it, and when he heard the third solid thump of heels hitting the floor, Thompson rose and moved cat-footedly to a more advantageous position.

"Let's get to the safe," a hoarse voice whispered.

The area of the room under the opened window was bathed suddenly in the glare of Carl Robey's flashlight.

"Don't move!" the big man snapped. Thompson flicked on his own light. Caught in the pinpoint crossfire of the flashlight beams, three white faces stared at the dark figures behind the dazzling brightness. "Turn around," Robey ordered. The men complied slowly. "Hands over your heads and palms flat against the wall," he continued.

In the glare of the flashlights half a dozen hands crept up the wall. "Okay, Jimmy. Cuff them. I'll call the desk."

"Who talked?" the tallest of the men facing the wall cried out passionately. "I'll kill the— Who talked?"

"You talked, Jeff," Thompson told him, deftly slipping three pairs of wrists into the three sets of handcuffs he had brought along. "All right, Carl. Make your call."

WHEN the last of the paper work had been completed and the prisoners processed and the lieutenant's congratulations duly savored, Carl Robey cornered his partner in the station-house locker room.

"All right," the gray-haired man said grimly. "Give. Before I go out of my feeble mind trying to figure it out. How did you *know* they were planning to knock that particular safe over? And why *three* sets of handcuffs, instead of two or four?"

Thompson smiled as he lit a cigarette.

"It was easy, given the original hunch," he said. "You remember that neither of us was happy about Jeff settling down in our precinct after the parole board turned him loose the last time, since we both had him figured for a real wrongo. I kept checking with his parole officer, and a month ago he told me he'd had unconfirmed rumors of Jeff's cutting corners on his parole regulations, hanging out in taverns

in wrong company, that sort of thing.

"I knew he was up to something, so I went by his rooming house one day and coaxed his landlord into giving me a look at his room. It was about what you'd expect, except that in one corner I saw an expensive-looking hi-fi unit with a quarter inch of dust on it, indicating that it wasn't being used. I knew right then how I was going to find out what Jefferson was up to. I spent ten minutes hooking up the speaker in the hi-fi so it was operating as a microphone, and then I ran a wire—"

"Wait a minute!" Carl Robey protested. "Wait a minute! You changed a *speaker* into a *microphone*? What kind of talk is that?"

"All speakers are microphones, properly converted," Thompson replied. "Usually you need an amplifier, because there's a loss of power, but it's no great trick. Just take the wire leading—"

"Spare me the lesson in electronics," Carl Robey said gloomily. "You know I never made it out of the sixth grade."

Thompson smiled. "All I did was run a wire from the converted speaker down to the basement, then brought in my voice-actuated portable tape recorder and connected it up in a closet to which the landlord gave me the key. Every morning I'd run in and put on a fresh reel of tape and take off the full one. I've got a stack of

tapes at home in which Jeff outlined the entire job.

"I knew everything about it except the date, although I knew it was going to be this weekend. I think Jeff didn't tell even his partners when he planned to move in to prevent exactly what happened."

"So if you knew all this, why'd you have me losing sleep?" Robey demanded indignantly. "We could've scooped 'em in their room and wrapped 'em up."

Thompson shook his head.

"Most courts won't accept that kind of evidence," he explained. "Now, anyway, although I believe they'll come to it. They should, since they're taking away so many of the lawman's tools." He smiled at Robey. "Simple, wasn't it?"

"Not for me," his partner said emphatically. "The Wizard of Oz has nothing on you, boy." A slow grin spread over his broad features. "Crime prevention—that's the name of the game!"

"This time the name of the game was tape," Thompson said.

"Okay, okay," Robey said. "You know what worries me? After this, what do we do for an encore the next time the lieutenant lines us up on a job?"

"When we need it, I'll think of something," Thompson said.

"I wouldn't bet against it, partner," Robey said.

Together they went out into what was left of the night.

# EXTREME SHOCK

by V. A. LEVINE

*A man who lived in his private hell . . . a girl who had spent her life keeping him there . . . Somehow I had to get past certain death to bring them together for the last time—before I walked into the waiting bullets . . .*



IT WAS A COOL November wind that blew me into the United Nations Secretariat early that Tuesday morning.

I took the escalator to the second floor of the conference building and strode down the corridor to the security office. I unlocked the door to my glass cubicle, the one reading CASIMIRO LOWRY, Assistant Chief, U.N. Security, removed my coat and sat behind the desk. I lit a cigarette and watched a tug pulling a string of barges downriver. I checked my watch. Eight-forty-five. The phone rang.

"Miro-san." It was the boss, Inspector Ryonosuke Akutagawa.

"Konnichi-wa. Good morning. Come and have some tea. We have things to discuss."

I came, slowly. He had a case. I needed a vacation. I had one scheduled for Friday. It looked like I was out of luck.

"Ah." Akutagawa half rose and bowed as I entered. "Please sit. You are well?" He poured the tea as he spoke. He handed me a miniature ceremonial cup.

"For the moment I am well."

"Excellent." We sipped. He said, "I have not forgotten your fishing holiday." He grinned—many wrinkles in a square shaped face with deepset black eyes. "However, this

is rather serious and the secretary-general has ordered an investigation."

I sighed.

Akutagawa said, "Eleanor Draftsman was lifted off the IRT subway tracks at West Twenty-third Street at eight this morning."

Eleanor Draftsman was the personal secretary to the *Chef de Cabinet*, one of the chief executive officers of the UN next to the secretary-general. I said: "Dead, I suppose."

He shook his head. "Alive. She had the presence of mind to hug the center well of the trackbed, so the train ran over her without touching her. Also, she avoided the live rail. Naturally, she's in shock. They took her to St. Vincent's."

I didn't like the way he'd put it. "You're not thinking she was pushed?"

"It is impossible to say at the moment." He made a slight negative motion. "It happened during the rush hour. Such accidents are not unknown."

I said, "She could have jumped, of course."

"If so, why seek the center well?"

"Changed her mind at the last minute. It's a hell of a way to go."

Akutagawa shook his head. "She either fell or she was pushed. Either way, I want a full report, Miro-san. We cannot afford to take a chance on its being a simple accident. She is too close to the S-G."

I asked about motive. He had a nine appointment with the secretary-general and the *Chef de Cabinet*. He felt he'd have a better idea once he talked to them. After he left I called Angus Narrijan at the Manhattan D.A.'s office. Narrijan, an assistant D.A., was our official contact on all confidential cases. We got along all right, though he had a habit of going off half-cocked.

"No leads," he said, "no witnesses." His big basso came rumbling through the earpiece of the phone like an IRT express. "Just confusion, packed sweating bodies and minimal visibility."

"Sounds like she slipped and fell."

"Yeah, that's what I think. You know how it is, Lowry; the train comes in and the crowd pushes forward, just like they always do. Then, pow, she slips, loses her balance, teeters on the edge, someone reaches out to grab her, misses. She falls, just as the local comes thundering in. I wouldn't have given a dime for her chances. My opinion, she's lucky she didn't end up in the morgue."

I thanked him for his opinion and hung up. After talking to Angus Narrijan I began to see that Akutagawa was just possibly right. It was looking like less of an accident. Like something more deliberate. Subway crowds don't usually surge forward when a train comes in. They step back. Also, it seemed

just too pat that Mrs. Draftsman should slip at the precise moment the train arrived.

Still, I thought Akutagawa had unfairly dismissed my theory, that Mrs. Draftsman had changed her mind at the last minute. Why not? Women change their minds all the time. Besides, I didn't like to think of her having been pushed. A probe of that type could take months. I had three days. And those Canadian bass were dancing in dazzling arcs before my eyes.

Akutagawa returned from his appointment on the 38th floor looking neither happy nor sad. He looked—well so help me—he looked inscrutable, all five feet five inches of him, and he was treading warily, like a dancer or judo player. He was no dancer but he was a judo player in the fourth rank, which meant the black belt and a whole lot of very discreet recognition.

He said, talking about Mrs. Draftsman, "She's in poor shape but they think she'll pull through." He handed me a manila folder with the word *Confidential* stamped across its face. The Draftsman dossier. He sat behind his desk and brought his hands together.

"At the cost of disappointing you, Miro-san," he said, "I must say, there's no evidence to support your contention that she jumped. The *Chef de Cabinet* feels strongly about this. He has nothing concrete, mind you."



CASIMIRO LOWRY

I made an impolite noise.

"But, after all, he knows the woman rather well. She's been his personal secretary since nineteen sixty-two." He stared at me for a moment, then continued: "He reports nothing abnormal in her behavior. She is, as he put it, 'a remarkably well put together person.' He feels it's inconceivable that she would jump. Well, that's it. You're going to have to do some digging."

I told him I'd look the record over, talk to some people, then report back.

With all respect to the opinions

of the *Chef de Cabinet*, I figured I might get closer to the truth about Mrs. Draftsman if I talked to some of the lower echelon people who knew her.

I started with the thirty-eighth floor. That's where the Secretary-General and *Chef de Cabinet* have their offices. Maybe Akutagawa was right, but I still wanted to test my theory. I could be right, and in any case both theories would get aired.

I spent most of my time on the thirty-eighth floor, though I hopped around on some of the lower floors, chatting with people who knew Mrs. Draftsman or had worked with her. That killed most of the day. And left little to show for it. Nothing in any case to shore up my theory of attempted suicide.

By four-thirty I'd collected the following, drawn from both Mrs. Draftsman's dossier and my interviews: She was a woman of thirty-six, a US national, dedicated to the United Nations and performing her role at the Secretariat in an intelligent and efficient manner.

She was an attractive brunette with large black eyes and a good figure. She was trusted by her boss, the *Chef de Cabinet*, as well as by the Secretary-General, and the executives and staff with whom she worked found her trustworthy and tactful. Her position was a responsible one. She was privy to most of the top level business conducted by the Executive Office of the Secre-

tary-General. The same for General Assembly business, for the *Chef de Cabinet* was also Under Secretary for General Assembly affairs.

Mrs. Draftsman had been married. She wasn't divorced, though, only separated. She shared a Chelsea apartment with a female roommate named Joan Chandler. She was a quiet one about her personal life, but someone knew she'd been separated from her husband, whose name was Noel Draftsman, for about a year. No romances during that period that anyone knew about.

She was involved in some extracurricular activities. She played violin for the UN Chamber Group; she worked afterhours for *UN Amici*, a private organization dedicated to furthering and explaining the work of the International Organization. That was about it. She looked very clean. I wasn't giving up though.

I wanted to get a look at Mrs. Draftsman's apartment and her roommate. Maybe they confided in one another. And maybe I could get enough information to wrap things up tonight. Akutagawa gave me a rare smile when I told him that. He told me to get a photograph of Noel Draftsman while I was at it, which I promised to do as I exited.

I traced Mrs. Draftsman's steps back and got involved in the rush hour. Which gave me a chance to verify my suspicions about the way

the subway mob acted. I was right. Angus Narolian was wrong. It tended to lean away from incoming trains. Then it surged forward after the doors of the train opened.

I got carried in by it, without effort on my part, but had a hell of a time fighting my way out at West 23rd Street. I finally did, though, crossed over and picked up a Transit cop on the way. He showed me where Mrs. Draftsman had landed on the uptown tracks.

He'd been on duty that morning and arrived moments after the train screeched to a halt. The first four cars ran over her. Subway trains don't stop on dimes—ever. They only seem to when you're riding in them and maybe don't have a strap to hang onto.

Getting her out had been a process. They didn't dare run the rest of the train over her. They didn't dare back up. So they uncoupled the cars closest to her and split the train, the front and rear portions moving in opposite directions. It held up traffic for more than twenty minutes, which threw the timetable off for the entire day.

Rough shake for the Transit Authority, I told the cop, and he looked at me funny, not quite sure how to take it. I told him thanks anyway and invited him to the United Nations to take a tour of the buildings and maybe buy some UNICEF cards in the General Assembly concourse.

I got to Mrs. Draftsman's apart-

ment at five thirty-five. She lived in an old high rise apartment house on Twenty-fourth Street, just off Ninth Avenue. I rang the 3-G bell several times and got no reply. My luck. I began to curse slowly and methodically.

"That's no way to talk about a lady," the lady said, and I spun around to face her. I hadn't heard her approach because the corridor was heavily carpeted, also because I'd been making too much noise with the mouth organ. She was something else again—six feet tall with flaming red hair, a pale skinned angelic face and a figure whose curves literally drew your eyes out. She was carrying a paper sack filled with groceries.

I cleared my throat, gave her the crooked smile and said: "Joan Chandler?"

She was. I told her who I was and she invited me in. I then told her I was doing a background investigation on Mrs. Draftsman and that she could help further her friend's UN career by answering my questions. She didn't mind. No raised eyebrows. Nothing to indicate surprise or foreknowledge.

She said, "I usually have a drink around this time every night. A double daquiri." She looked at me with those liquid green eyes. "I hate to drink alone," she said, pouting just enough so it showed.

I came back with a snappy answer: "Tonight you can drink with Casimiro Lowry. Okay, baby?"

She gave me a dazzling smile and proceeded to shake up the rum and lime and ice mixture. It was quite a show. She had taken her coat off and was dressed in a miniskirt, pumps and snug sweater. I'm no lecher, ordinarily, but like I say, it was some show. She knew it and I knew it and she knew—well, you get the picture. Naturally, I was hoping the evening would prove helpful to our investigation.

One thing was bugging me. I asked her, "How did you and Mrs. Draftsman ever hook up?"

She laughed. She liked to show her teeth. They were white and very even.

"You won't believe this," she said, "but we were roommates in college." She mentioned an out-of-town institution. "We didn't have too much in common in those days. Now we've got even less."

"Then why—?"

"Economics, nostalgia, a smidgeon of inertia. I don't know." She raised one shoulder slightly. "Another drink?" I refused. She started on another. She said, "What do you care anyway? Eleanor's out of the running."

"How's that?" I said it easily.

"I mean—" She sat on the couch beside me. She brought her glass and the shaker with her. I allowed her to refill her own glass. She looked up at me. "You sure you want to talk about Eleanor?"

She was pretty close and the rum-lime smell was overpowering.

I stuck a cigarette in her mouth and lit it. She blinked, twice. "I guess you do," she said.

"For awhile." I gave her another crooked smile. "You said she was out of the running.

"She is." She drained her glass, refilled it. "She hasn't looked at a man since she started living here and that was a year ago. You want to know why?"

"Sure."

"Because she's married to the UN. To an inanimate, faceless world organization. She's in early and she works late almost all the time. When she isn't working for the UN she's doing something for one of those outfits who call themselves friends of the UN."

I asked: "What about Noel Draftsman?"

"What about him? He probably got so he couldn't stand the competition any longer." She took an unsteady trip to the liquor cabinet and mixed another round.

"What's he doing?"

"Who?"

I repeated the name slowly, patiently.

"M-m-m." She poured herself another drink and sat in an armchair opposite me. She looked like she was having trouble focusing.

"How about laying off that stuff for awhile?" I said, and she emptied the glass. I sighed. "Where's Noel Draftsman?"

"How the hell should I know, buster?"—It came out 'busshder'.

"I don't even know the guy. Never met him. Didn't even know Eleanor was in New York until a year ago."

She emptied another glass, got up, grinned idiotically, and collapsed. She must have drunk three-fifths of the quart herself. I went over and felt her pulse. It was slow and strong. Nothing wrong with her that a good night's sleep and maybe two years of intensive psychotherapy wouldn't cure. I laid her out on the couch and looked around the apartment, figuring this was a good time to try and locate a photo of Noel Craftsman.

The phone rang as I turned toward the bedroom. I let it ring a couple of times while I checked the tops of the dressers. Which was maybe silly, considering the state of the Craftsman's relationship, but you can never tell. Then I answered the phone. That is, I picked up the receiver.

It was still eight inches from my ear when this joker started talking. He might have been primed at that.

He said, "Hello, baby, I'm around the corner in a phone booth. Just wanted to let you know I'm on my way. Hello, hello—"

I hung up. And lit out. Fast. I didn't want any trouble. I had enough as it was. I brooded on it all the way uptown. I'd spent twelve hours on the case—a day and a half counted in hours—and what did I have to show for it? A

big fat zero. I went back to the office to do some planning for the following day. I also wanted to take another look in the Craftsman dossier.

The following morning I gave all of it to Akutagawa verbatim. The way he likes it—dialogue, facial expressions, the whole bit. Always he would listen intently, eyes turned inward, unmoving except to nod once in awhile or ask me to clarify a point.

He said, talking about Joan Chandler, "She was a rather striking redhead?"

"Just as I described her. And a lush, to boot."

"So." He nodded. "Pour some tea, please."

I obliged. I said: "We're out of luck on the photograph. I didn't get a chance to look around much, because this joker called."

"A pity," was all he said, which meant he was extremely dissatisfied with our progress.

I added, "I wouldn't mind betting that Noel Craftsman could tell us a thing or two."

"That, I think, will be our first line of attack," he finally said. "Someone remembered that he'd worked for the Cranford Endowment for Peace. Called late yesterday afternoon. One of the secretaries on the thirty-eighth floor. Also, see what you can find on Joan Chandler. I suspect there's more there than meets the eye. I've already put through a request for

clearance, on both Chandler and Draftsman."

Meaning the usual: New York Police Department, FBI and Interpol. I nodded, finished my tea and headed back to my cubicle. I had a feeling this was going to be a tougher case than we'd figured. Regardless of how it finally turned out.

Though I had to admit it was looking more and more like Mrs. Draftsman would not have jumped. Joan Chandler, maybe. But Eleanor Draftsman was something else again. The UN had quite a few staffers like that—totally dedicated to the idea and the organization. They had plenty to live for.

I put through a call to Cranford Endowment. Personnel there tried to be helpful but all they could tell me was that Noel Draftsman had left them three years earlier.

They didn't know where he'd gone. No one had called for references on him. This was all memory work because the personnel record had been destroyed a year after Draftsman's exit. Company policy, because of space limitations.

He'd been with them maybe five years. They had no recollection of where he'd come from, but seemed to remember that he'd been in the military sometime after World War II. They promised to call if they came up with anything else. I thanked them and rang off.

Next I called Joe Benares of Ajax Probes, a company which spe-

cializes in credit investigation. Joe was an old buddy of mine from the days when we ran divisional security in Korea. I told him what I wanted and he promised to run a fast check.

In the meantime I called UN Amici, the outfit Mrs. Draftsman worked for after hours.

I played this one off the top of my head when a gushing society type answered the phone and asked if she could help me. She had a curiously split voice: one half contralto, the other half soprano, as though her voice had just broken, though it was hard to tell in which direction it was heading. She introduced herself as Mrs. Brownell.

I said, "We'd like to get hold of Eleanor Draftsman—"

"Who is this?" Her voice dropped several octaves. It was now cautious, hedging.

"This is Mr. Random," I said.

"Yes?"

"From the Wayfarers—"

"I don't believe I am familiar—"

"Excuse me. I thought everyone was familiar with the Wayfarers, Mrs. Brownell."

"It does sound vaguely familiar—" Her voice trailed off.

"Yes, we're a club devoted to world travel. A private club, you understand." I waited for her to say yes, then continued: "We understand that your Mrs. Draftsman provides informative talks on the UN—"

"Yes, indeed she does." Now

she was gushing again. "She's one of our most talented speakers. Always in such constant demand. I only wish she were able to give more than two talks a month."

I said: "Is she available?"

"I shall have to find that out for you, Mr. Random. If you'll just hold the phone for a moment."

"Thank you." I heard her rif-



fling through some papers.

She came back on: "I'm afraid she's already given two talks for this month. I don't believe—"

"Well," I interrupted, "maybe next month."

"Yes, well, we do have other speakers. . . ."

"We want Mrs. Draftsman," I said, then added, "unless of course you're available, Mrs. Brownell."

"Oh." Her voice had risen. "No, I'm afraid I don't accept speaking engagements. I—"

I told her that was a pity because she had such a fine voice. I promised to call next month, then cut the connection.

Joe Benares of Ajax Probes called back soon afterwards. Mrs. Draftsman, it seemed, had a lousy credit record. She owed around

three thousand dollars to three major stores in the metropolitan area and a thousand more to assorted smaller concerns. At least one company was considering legal action. Her bank balance was in the upper three digits.

As for Joan Chandler, she was a big spender but met all her bills on time. She was presently working for International Acoustics on Forty-second and Lexington. Secretary to the president, George King. She'd been with them since nineteen fifty-eight, following her graduation from college and separation from the U.S. Army.

I asked Joe about International Acoustics. He said they made hi-fi components and bugging devices. They'd been in business since the early fifties.

He had very little on George King, the president: sole owner, AA Dun and Bradstreet rating, widower, lived at three hundred fifty East Thirty-sixth Street, a co-operative deal.

I asked Joe to find out more about King. He wasn't happy about it because it would mean digging. Digging meant spending time. Time was money. I told him to bill us and he said he'd think about it.

I reminded him that the UN was the world's best hope for the peaceful settlement of disputes, hung up before he could think up a smart answer, and hotfooted it into Aku-tagawa's office.

It was teatime. *Lapsang Sou-*

*chong.* The tea with the smoky flavor. Akutagawa poured me a cup as I walked in. I reported.

He said, "I do not believe the credit record is significant. There is, as you might know, a *modus operandi* of sorts pertaining to the sexes . . ."

I listened respectfully. Akutagawa more than earned that respect—twenty years with the Tokyo Metropolitan Police, Superintendent for twelve, UN Security Chief for the past ten years. The upshot of it was that women do not commit suicide because of debt. Men do, for a variety of complicated reason which Akutagawa sounded like he understood perfectly.

Me, I was just listening and sipping *Lapsang Souchong*. I let him wind it up, then told him about my conversation with Assistant D.A. Angus Narijian. That brought a smile and a thousand wrinkles to his kindly face.

Then the phone rang. It was Narijian himself, on the other end of the wire. He wanted to meet me for lunch. He doesn't usually invite me out to lunch. So I very cautiously asked if he was footing the bill. He said he was, which meant he had an ulterior motive. I asked him what the occasion was but he refused to elaborate. Said he'd talk about it when he saw me.

I arranged to meet him at the Bamberry Fair on Lexington and Forty-first. Akutagawa, who had been listening on the extention,

raised an eyebrow at me as I broke the connection.

He said, "It sounds as though he's uncovered something. Probably on the Draftsmans. It would be nice to have more news on Noel. However"—he wiggled his forefinger at me—"under no circumstances is Narijian, or any of his colleagues, including the police, to see Mrs. Draftsman. Try to talk him out of it if he mentions the possibility."

"Leave Narijian to me," I said as I picked up the phone and asked to be connected with Joan Chandler at International Acoustics.

She sounded in better shape this morning. She said she'd just love to lunch with me at the Bamberry Fair. I didn't mention Narijian. I thought I'd surprise her. I had a hunch I wanted to play out. That was how I put it to Akutagawa, though I phrased it more elegantly.

"I was working intuitively," I told him, "like an artist taking imaginative leaps across the void."

Akutagawa didn't say anything, though he stared thoughtfully at me for a moment. Finally he said, "It would be helpful, you know, to have even a snapshot of Noel Draftsman. Perhaps Miss Chandler can oblige."

I said I'd do what I could.

Narijian was pacing the plush lounge of the Bamberry Fair when I arrived. He was a big man, a former end for Columbia, whose

hair and gut were just beginning to show serious signs of wear, though his tremendous bass voice was not.

"Lowry," he roared, "you're late!" He grasped my arm with a meaty hand. "Come on. I've got a table reserved."

I told him how and where to get off. Politely. He's the kind of guy who doesn't know his own strength. Not that I couldn't have taken him, except that it would have created an unnecessary disturbance and ended up with both of us being forcibly ejected. Besides, I had other plans for him. Joan Chandler should be arriving any minute. I steered him to one side of the lounge and told him roughly what I had in mind. I then asked him what he had on his mind.

It really wasn't much. He could have told it over the phone, only he figured we could help him out. Akutagawa had been right. It was about the Draftsmans. The police wanted to talk to Noel Draftsman in connection with some fraudulent dealings in certain department stores.

Nrijian wanted me to put the finger on Noel. He had started beating his gums about Eleanor Draftsman when Joan Chandler arrived. She had already parked her coat and as she walked across the lounge toward us every male head swung around to match her progress. She was something to see. Long red hair cascading down to her shoulders, fluid hips, a lively

treasure chest and long, spectacular legs. I'd seen them all before so I didn't spend too much time ogling, at least not as much as Nrijian.

I introduced them. Nrijian had a little trouble with his voice at first but after a moment he was okay. I told her he was a pal of mine who'd made the big time as a lawyer and she looked interested. She hung on every mellifluous word and he strung them out like glistening pearls.

My strategy worked perfectly, though I couldn't get two consecutive words in sideways. *Amor vincit omnia*, as they say, and once Nrijian got started there was no stopping him. The roast beef was excellent. Ditto for the flaming dessert and dry martinis.

I wondered how Nrijian was going to explain this on his expense voucher. It didn't seem to bother him when he picked up the tab. I went through the motions of splitting it with him but he waved me away with a magnificent gesture. All told it came to \$31.50. He left a dollar-fifty tip, to which I added a trio because I figured I'd like to come back sometime and still get waited on.

Nrijian excused himself to make a call, no doubt to tell them down at Leonard Street that he had a hot one and was following it up. We arranged to meet him in the lounge in a few minutes time.

I took the time to shoot a couple of questions at Joan Chandler. She still insisted she didn't know Noel Draftsman. She'd never seen a picture of him and didn't know if Eleanor had one. So far as she knew, Eleanor was careful with money. Then Narian came running in and I let him take Joan back to International Acoustics and her boss, George King.

I called Akutagawa to check in. I didn't want him to think I was holding anything back. Also it was possible he might have solved the case while I was out. He did that occasionally, though most of the time he preferred to have me on hand to help wind things up. Not that I would have minded this time. I was still hoping to get away Friday.

But all he said was that he was still trying for a line on Noel Draftsman. He promised to talk to the conductor of the chamber music group Mrs. Draftsman played with, though he didn't think anything would come of it. Also he was hoping that a witness to her subway fall might step forward.

I reminded him this was New York. He didn't comment on that but suggested that I do some more probing into Joan Chandler's background. I said okay, hung up and walked west on Forty-second Street to Seventh Avenue where I took the subway down to Twenty-third Street.

Nothing was falling into place,

so far as I could see. We still didn't have a motive, though the business with the money was puzzling. As for opportunity, it looked like anyone's. I'd feel a lot better when we knew more about Noel Draftsman. But then maybe it wasn't a personal thing and we were hitting the wrong angle.

I thought back over the current UN scene. Maybe there was a clue to be found in the proceedings of the major organs, like the security council, general assembly, economic and social council, etc. Trouble was, almost everything under discussion was highly controversial and offered grounds for outside reaction. Like, the Security Council was debating the Jordanian charge of aggression against Israel, the General Assembly was discussing nuclear test suspension and halting the spread of nuclear weapons. So it went. There might be something to that angle, but the approach was fruitless.

I quit thinking about it as I stepped off the train at West Twenty-third Street and walked upstairs to the token booth. The Transit cop wasn't around so I spoke to the change-maker behind the grill. I asked him about his clientele. He didn't remember Eleanor Draftsman, but he sure had no trouble recalling Joan Chandler.

He had an eye for redheads, he told me, and Joan Chandler was both a redhead and a regular customer, a late customer. She always

came rushing down at nine-thirty every morning, come rain or shine, and that included yesterday morning. She was some babe, he told me, and I agreed.

She was. Everyone agreed to that. Even the super in her building, a little guy with glasses who gave his name as Morris Greem, though he didn't like the idea of giving anything away. He took my fin with a sneer. Little guy in his forties with a Caesar hairdo, whose left eye kept winking at me.

I didn't like his looks, so I didn't tell him who I was. I used one of Joe Benares' business cards: Ajax Probes. Greem didn't like Eleanor Draftsman but the worst he could tell me about her was that she worked for that "Pinko outfit" on Forty-second Street and the River, meaning of course the UN.

He started to elaborate, a real fanatic, but I cut him short. I asked him how long he'd been the super. He said, one year. I asked him if he was married and he balked. I told him I'd be back to spend the rest of that five.

He turned white and started to call me a lousy, no good—At the same time he reached behind his apartment door and grabbed for something he was in the process of transferring from one hand to the other when I kicked the door open.

It caught him on the side of the jaw—and a Colt Peacemaker dropped from his nerveless fingers. My God—a .45 caliber long-bar-



RYONOSUKE AKUTAGAWA

reled Peacemaker! It must have weighed four pounds. No wonder he'd had trouble switching it from hand to hand. With its seven and one-half inch barrel it was something like one-handing a carbine.

I dropped it in the top unit of Greem's oldfashioned toilet and on the way out picked up the duplicate key to Joan Chandler's pad. Greem was snoozing peacefully: no sneer, no eyetick. On second thoughts I dragged him into the bathroom and locked him in. Then I hoofed it up to 3-G, fitted the key in the lock, turned it, pushed the door open and slipped in.

I sensed movement behind me, began to turn, but didn't make it. Whoever chopped me down was an expert. I took the heel of a hand at the base of the skull and crumpled. I didn't have a chance. Now

I knew how Greem must have felt. When I woke the karate expert was gone, which figured. Also the apartment was in a shambles, which also figured. It didn't look like I'd crimped his style. He'd done a pretty thorough job. I looked around, though, straightening everything out as I moved along. I had to do that out of self protection. It wouldn't have taken an overly perceptive cop to trace my movements that afternoon.

But there were no photographs of anyone in the apartment. No doubt the karate expert had seen to that. Just like he'd seen to my neck. It felt like it had been knocked permanently out of joint, and my right shoulder weighed in at maybe fifty pounds. My head ached and I had to rest several times during my housekeeping chores. I walked out of there feeling ~~like~~ mad I could have ripped up the sidewalk, only I couldn't bring my head around to focus on it.

I made it uptown in time for tea with Akutagawa. He nodded with satisfaction as I explained the day's happenings to him.

"Ah, so," he said, "the fish bites."

"Yeah," I said, fingering my neck.

"Very good." He was pouring the tea as he spoke. He handed me a cup. I sipped. It was jasmine.

"Now," Akutagawa continued, "we offer a little more bait, prepare the net and then cast it at the appropriate time. With any luck we

should have our catch by tonight." He grinned at me. "Then the real business of fishing can begin, eh?"

I couldn't believe it. I said, "You have a special time in mind?"

"Most certainly," he said. "You understand, I can't be absolutely precise, but I would say, between seven and ten. It all depends on Joan Chandler." He added that he'd assigned one of our men to keep tabs on her.

I repeated her name and stared at him.

"It is all very simple," he said. "Joan Chandler lied when she said she didn't know Noel Draftsman. According to the FBI they served in the same intelligence unit during the Korean War. Both were stationed in Washington. Draftsman was Joan Chandler's immediate superior."

I grunted. Akutagawa refilled the teacups. We sipped. He withdrew a small photograph from the manila folder on his desk and slipped it to me. "They sent this over too."

Noel Draftsman in uniform. First lieutenant, US Army. I turned the photograph over and read the FBI description: "six feet, one inch; one hundred and sixty pounds; brown blond hair, slightly longer than crew-cut; blue eyes; no distinguishing marks." There following an FBI number and fingerprint classification. I handed it back to Akutagawa.

"He looks like a hungry fox," I

said. I wondered if he was the one who had bopped me. He looked capable enough.

Akutagawa said: "It might surprise you to learn that Morris Greem was in the same unit, at roughly the same time. The FBI are interested in him because they've received word that he'd involved in a radical right wing movement.

"Something called the Citizens' Council for the Preservation of American Liberties."

I wasn't surprised. "Any connection between Joan Chandler and Greem?"

Akutagawa shook his head. "It's too early to tell. They just put Greem under surveillance."

I asked, "What about Joan Chandler, then?"

"Ah, yes, Joan Chandler." Akutagawa brought his hands together in a prayerlike attitude and stared into the middle distance. He finally refocused on me. "You will call Narjian and ask him how he fared with Joan Chandler. I think we can use Mr. Narjian to good advantage."

Akutagawa gave me a few other instructions and I called Narjian at the D.A.s office downtown. I held the phone away from my ear to minimize the impact of that tremendous voice.

"She's a gorgeous hunk of woman," Narjian was saying, "but she's simple-minded as hell. A dumb redhead who's so gullible she

believes the United Nations is run from the Kremlin."

Akutagawa, listening on the extension, raised an eyebrow and nodded slightly. I let him take over and he told Narjian we'd assigned a tail to Joan Chandler. He asked him if he'd made a date with her for seven that evening. He said he had. Akutagawa congratulated him; then explained the evening's strategy to him.

Narjian sounded skeptical but agreed to hop uptown with a search warrant when we called him between six-thirty and seven. He also agreed to bring along one of the cops assigned to the D.A.s office. That completed that phase of the operation.

Akutagawa looked pleased with himself. His eyes gave him away, momentarily. Then he had everything under control once again.

Our man called at six. Joan Chandler had gone directly home from International Acoustics. Akutagawa told him to stay alert, particularly around six-thirty, when he expected all hell to break loose. That wasn't the way he put it but that was the sense of it.

The Secretary-General called and Akutagawa explained the latest developments in the case to him. The hospital called. Eleanor Draftsman was now off the critical list and resting quietly, and we could talk to her provided we didn't overtax her.

At six-twenty-five Akutagawa

put the call through to Joan Chandler. The phone rang three times. A woman answered.

"Hello." It sounded like Joan Chandler.

"Hello," Akutagawa said. "What number is this, please?"

"Who is this? Hello." It was Joan Chandler. I gave Akutagawa the nod.

"Yes, hello. This is the office of the district attorney."

"What? Who? Say is this some kind of joke?"

"No, madam, this is not any kind of joke. I understand that Assistant District Attorney Angus Narrijian is at this number. I would like to speak with him, if you please."

There was a gasp, then silence at the other end of the wire. Then Joan Chandler came back to us and her voice was noticeably thicker than it had been: "I'm sorry, you've got the wrong number. There's no one here by that name." She hung up fast.

Akutagawa grinned at me. "Get the car out front, Miro-san. I'll join you as soon as I hear from Portman." Portman was the man assigned to tail Joan Chandler.

I hustled down to the garage to get the Volkswagen. Within three minutes I had it waiting outside the glass doors of the Secretariat. Akutagawa emerged ten minutes later, black homburg set at a jaunty angle on head and the rest of him well protected against the elements.

"That was good work," he said, as he slid in beside me and slammed the door. "I must remember to commend Portman."

I got the car rolling.

"Let me guess where we're heading," I said.

"You are serious?"

"Yes, sir. Sixteen hundred Pennsylvania Avenue, northwest."

"But that's—Ah, so, you are joking. I apologize. Turn left here and take Second Avenue downtown to Thirty-sixth Street—three hundred and fifty East Thirty-sixth Street is our destination."

"But that's George King's address. International Acoustics. How—"

"That is a question I cannot answer with certainty. Except that he is the first one Joan Chandler flees to upon hearing the news that Narrijian is on the D.A.s staff. Also seen arriving shortly afterwards was Morris Green and another man fitting Noel Draftsman's description."

I said: "But—"

"Plus one final point kindly supplied by the regional FBI office—that George King was operations officer in the same intelligence unit that Draftsman and Joan Chandler served in between nineteen fifty and nineteen fifty-three. The interesting thing about King is that he received a medical discharge—paranoid-schizophrenia was the diagnosis, which roughly adds up to a persecution mania. The Army had to get rid of him because he kept

seeing Communist spies in all the Federal agencies, and they were naturally out to get him."

"In other words, he's crazy. Is he dangerous?"

"He could be. We will have to be careful. Narijian's man will of course be armed."

I made a left turn on East Thirty-sixth Street. It was the last building on the right hand side, a ten-story modern complex which was about ten years old. Lots of glass and brushed steel siding.

We parked a little ways up the street. Portman came over and gave us the lowdown. They were all still up there. Each had taken the elevator to the fifth floor. George King's apartment was 5-A. Portman had scouted the outside of King's place. It had a front and rear door.

There were five wooden crates outside the back door, irregular in size and very heavy. They were unmarked but resembled ammocrates.

Akutagawa assigned Portman to the lobby of three-fifty just as Narijian came barreling around the corner in an unmarked police car. I could tell it was Narijian driving. He always drove that way, all out and mostly on two wheels. He too had delusions of grandeur, though maybe he wasn't quite as dangerous as George King.

He double-parked and came striding over, waving this legal looking document under our noses.

Akutagawa gave him a slight

bow: "Ah, Mr. Narijian, you made excellent time."

They shook hands.

Narijian nodded stiffly at me.

"You're tires are still smoking," I said. His passenger was ash-faced.

"Twelve minutes from City Hall," he roared.

Akutagawa said: "I see you have brought the warrant. Excellent, Mr. Narijian. Come, let us serve it. I will explain how things have developed up to this point." He took him by the arm and I brought up the rear.

I left Akutagawa and Narijian outside 5-A and cut around to the rear door. I could see what Portman meant. They didn't look like crates of canned goods. The wood was new and unmarked, which probably meant that King and his crew had gotten rid of the original crates. I eased the .38 in its shoulder holster and stood to one side of the door.

I didn't have to wait long. This joker came soft-footing out, with a small suitcase gripped in one hand. It was Noel Draftsman. I recognized him from the photo.

"Hello, Noel," I said softly, and he swung around on me, suitcase first. I let him come, then at the last moment side-stepped and jarred him off-balance. His momentum carried him into the wall and I chopped him down with a backhand to the base of the trapezius. Which made us even, if he was

the one who'd bopped me. If not, then I was one up on him.

I opened the suitcase. It was filled with carefully arranged packages of thermoplastique. I set it down gingerly and hauled Draftsman into the apartment. I must have made more noise than I thought, because everyone's eyes were turned my way.

"What's this?" roared Narijian.

Greem let out a little sob when he saw me. King knocked Narijian to one side and broke for the window. Greem lunged for Akutagawa. Joan Chandler sat frozen. I made for Greem, but Akutagawa was there first, reacting with stunning ease. Straight finger blow to the solar plexus. Short chop to the side of the head. And that was all for Greem.

Narijian hadn't done so well. He made a flying tackle at King and got kicked in the head for his ingenuity. Proof positive that you can't carry college football techniques over into the real world. Now King was on the fire escape, descending rapidly.

I was about to take a shot at him when Narijian roared, "Hold it." He came rushing to the window. "Craven will take him." He yelled down. It sounded like a full-throated bullhorn and I'll swear the street reverberated.

King shot at Narijian and splintered the wood frame by his head. It sounded like he was using a .38. Then the deeper sound of a .45 cut

in. Craven. Two shots, a scream from the third story of the fire escape, then a soft thud, and silence.

That about wrapped it up. King was dead when he hit the sidewalk. Which was a pity, because it would have been nice to know where he got the thermoplastique, also the crates of .30 caliber ammunition and the automatic rifles outside his back door.

As it turned out Draftsman and Greem wouldn't talk. Joan Chandler would, only she didn't know quite as much as they presumably did. She knew enough, though, to deeply implicate them. Violation of the Sullivan weapons act was only part of it.

As Akutagawa put it the following morning: "The group—The Citizens' Council for the Preservation of American Liberties—had planned a wave of terror against the United Nations by planting thermoplastique in the cars of prominent UN officials. The object was to disrupt the daily operations of the Organization, to the extent that no business could be transacted."

After several months of this, interspersed with 3.5 mm rifle shots at the buildings and maybe a few long range rifle assassinations, the American people would see how ineffectual the UN was, besides being a drain on the economy, and they would demand that it pack up and go to where it should have gone

in the first place—namely, Moscow. That at least was the plan George King thought up.

International Acoustics, which was quite prosperous, existed solely to finance the plan. More than ten years of effort went into perfecting the plan. King was a meticulous man. He kept voluminous notes on the plan's progress, as you know. At the bottom of it all was his sickness, which caused him to believe the UN was part of an international communist conspiracy, aimed at his and his country's destruction."

I said: "So King was crazy, a nut, like I said."

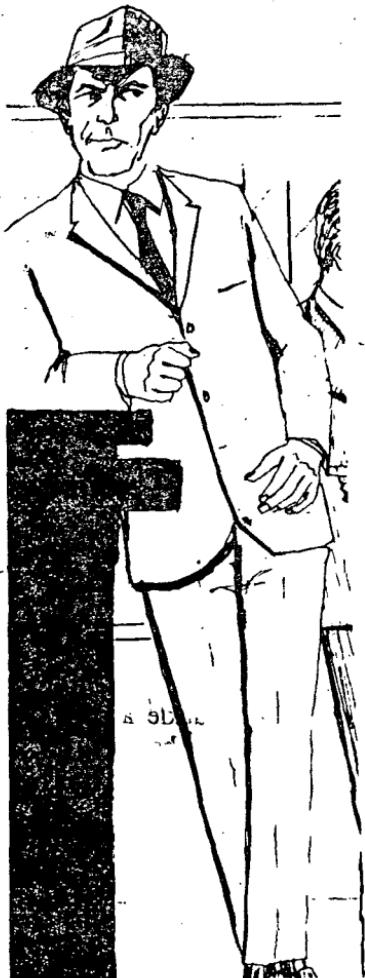
"Of course he was. But you see the plan might never have been threatened if Draftsman hadn't panicked and tried to kill his wife."

"You mean, she stumbled onto it?"

Akutagawa shook his head. "Not at all. She stumbled onto quite something else again. They were only separated, you see, not divorced; and she discovered that he was making rather extensive use of her charge accounts. She confronted him with this and threatened to expose him. He thought he was a desperate man. Hence the extreme reaction."

Akutagawa checked his watch, reached over for the teapot and poured. The scent of jasmine filled the air. "A small celebration," he said. "Imported *Pouchong Aromatic*."

We sipped and were silent for a



moment. Finally he said: "It was doubly ironic, don't you see. Draftsman gave the game away for the wrong reason. But there's no indication that King was ready to implement the plan."

"He convinced Draftsman."

"Yes. Draftsman entered into

his madness. But this was a desperate scheme which had been maturing for ten years. King could easily have spent another ten years perfecting it. My feeling is that after awhile the means took precedence over the ends."

"You mean," I said, "he got hung up on the details."

"Certainly. Just look at his journals. All of it represents planning. Not a word about operations. That, incidentally, was another reason why the Army could no longer use him. He was supposed to be an operations officer. Instead, he spent all his time planning. Incredible."

I started to get up when the phone rang. Akutagawa got it, listened for a moment, grinned, then handed it to me. It was Joe Benares of Ajax Probes. He sounded excited. "Listen, Lowry, I'm calling about George King. He—"

"Who?" I took a sip of jasmine tea. It was heady stuff.

"George King. International Acoustics. For Pete's sake, the guy you asked me to investigate."

"Oh, George King. Yeah, Joe, what about him?"

There was a slight pause, then: "Hey, Lowry, you ain't tippling this early in the morning?"

"You know me, Joe."

"Yeah. Well, listen, you got to watch out for this King. He's a nut. Maybe he ain't certifiable, but he's playing footsie with a bunch of kooks who'd like to see the UN sink into the East River, maybe help it along."

"Yeah? No kidding, Joe!" I took another sip of tea. I felt pretty smug about things.

There was a second pause, longer than the first. "Lowry, you sure you're okay? That ain't the latest football scores I just read you. I mean, this guy could be dangerous. In my humble opinion, Kimosabe, you ought to do something about him."

I said: "You read the morning papers yet, Joe?"

"No."

"Okay, read them, then write me if you have any questions—care of Rasmussen, Thousand Islands."

"You gone daft, Lowry?"

"Nope," I said, "just gone fishing, Kimosabe."




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*Somewhere out there in the wasteland a man was on his way to a fortune. But first he had a date with death!*

THE TWO OUTBACK men had been digging test holes up a dry Paleozoic stream bed for well over a fortnight, following a dipping gold-trace.

Now Wally Cord was in a five-foot hole which he figured must be the fountainhead of the old deposit, and Bill Huffer had returned to camp to refill the canteen. It was high time.

The Great Sandy Desert sprawled around the little scrub hills like a white and brown circle. Rains were weeks late in the back country of the Australian continent —only the rabbits and kangaroos

could survive in that drouth-bitten world.

Cord's pick grated on broken rock and he paused to examine the find. Broken quartz, he thought, and went at it with the pick again. Then he thrust his shovel into the loose mass. His eye caught a gleam of yellow and he dropped the shovel and hunkered down to rub the dirt from a piece of rotten quartz.

It was only half rock he held in his hand; the other half was virgin gold. Big chunk, too. And there were more and more of them. It was a rich pocket—a glory hole.

Then Bill Huffer's shadow fell over the pit.

"So we've struck it, eh?" Huffer's voice was casual, mild, just as if they both hadn't been ready to chuck it as a bad job.

It was one of the things about Huffer that rubbed Cord's cross-grained: that smug, smiling complacency. And he was so damn fastidious, always trying to play the gentleman in his parlor. A hell of a man for a rough outback swaggy to tie up with!

Cord turned and looked up into Huffer's calm, smiling, sunburned face, and he said, "That's right, mate. We're rich." And it was right then the idea came into being.

*You're a dead man, mate,* he thought.

The sun was smoldering over the red clay hills and murky haze of scrubby trees when the partners strolled down the trail to their camp in the runty eucalyptus. A ruddy wash spread out over the western sky and dust floated in the hot air like ashes.

"I knew it had to be there," Huffer said nonchalantly.

*Yes you did, you s.o.b.* Cord thought. "That's right," he said aloud. "Something had to be up there with all the color we found down in the dry wash." But his mind was on other things. . . .

There were two ways of doing it. One, he emptied the Lister bag—their only source of water—and took off in the truck, leaving Huf-

fer out there to die of thirst. Two, he emptied the spare gas cans in the truck and let Huffer run out of gas a couple hundred miles out in the desert. Either way you looked at it, nobody could say he had laid a hand on Huffer. Not technically.

Huffer's pockets were blistered with nuggets and he had trouble fishing out a coin.

"Toss you to see who goes to file the claim," he said.

"Righto," Cord said. "Heads."

The coin spun and Huffer caught it and slapped it on his wrist.

"Tails." He smiled about it. "Looks like I get the beer."

"You've got all the luck, mate," Cord said. He smiled too.

So he would have to arrange to empty the spare gas cans . . .

Cord walked off into the scrub and returned a few minutes later with an armload of sandalwood sticks with which he built a fire to boil a billy can of water for tea while Huffer mixed a mess of damper dough from flour and water.

"Water's getting fairly low in the Lister bag," Huffer said.

"Don't worry about it," Cord said. "I'll have enough to get by. You'll be back within three days."

That was the one chancy part about staying behind—the water. The Lister supply was low, and he was going to have to make it stretch for . . . Let's see, he thought. *Today is the first, and those two rab-biters who are trapping up north*

*said they'd look in on us on their way back on the tenth.* Ten long days then.

It was going to be a tight dry squeeze, but he could do it if he had to. He would stay relatively immobile in the shade and would ration his water as if each drop were a golden nugget.

Pungent blue smoke of the sandalwool rose in the air like incense and Cord pulled back from it. He stood up and scanned the landscape, his eyes moving along the path that led down to the truck parked in the she-oaks, then along the bush track that wandered on into the scrub and burning sand. It was going to be a cruel swollen-tongue death way out there.

Huffer dropped a portion of tea into the billy can as he removed it from the fire. He glanced up at his partner.

"No sign of rain," he said.

"Nope," Cord agreed. He hunkered down and looked at Huffer, hating him. Huffer came from a good family, once; never let you forget it either. He wasn't like the other outback swaggies. He was always as neat as a pin, no matter how grubby the job; never lost his temper, never swore like a cobber, and Bill Huffer was always smiling that damn self-satisfied, complacent smile.

*The desert will wipe it off your dial, mate,* Cord thought. He almost laughed aloud at his sudden sense of secret power. Huffer's

death was going to make Cord one of the richest men in Australia.

Darkness settled over them as they completed their scant meal. The needle leafed she-oaks stood grim and ghastly with their barren broken branches. Strange shadows began darting to and fro, and squeals and squeaks sounded around the two men. Frantic rabbits were out there in the baked dark looking for water.

A kangaroo poked its head into the skyline to watch furtively, and a pair of emus came up like stalking brown ghosts and vanished. Foxes herded among the rabbits with tails in the dust, and the fluting whistle of a boobook owl came from the scrub.

They got their lantern going, emptied the nuggets from their pockets and started rubbing the dirt away from fragment after fragment, tossing them into their goldpan. Smiling, Bill Huffer paraphrased one of Mother Goose's nursery jingles:

"One for the master, one for the dame, and one for the little boy who'll file the claim."

Cord watched him, his eyes iridescent in the lantern light.

"You'll set yourself up fancy now, eh mate?" he said. "You'll likely go to England and play the swell."

"Not a bit of it," Huffer said. "I mean to stay here and buy a sheep station. I like it out here."

*Do you?* Cord thought, and

again he had to snap back his laughter. *Well, I'll see that you get all of it you like.*

They rolled into their blankets and said good night and Huffer composed himself for sleep. Cord pretended sleep. The moon rose, a brimming red mask of a face peering over the horizon, and now and then a few dingoes yelped their wild dog cry in the distance.

Then it was midnight and Huffer was breathing soft fluttery sounds through his half-parted lips, and Cord rolled quietly from his blanket.

He slipped down the path to the she-oak stand and climbed into the back of the old truck that had been long ago retired from the army. They kept three five-gallon gas cans in a rack in there and Cord removed them one by one and hauled them out in the scrub and emptied them into the parched sand. No trace was left except a lingering pungent odor of gasoline.

He returned the empties to the rack in the truckbed and then paused to think of what else. The radiator. A man could live off the rusty water in a radiator if he had to. He went around to the front of the truck and eased up the hood, drew a penknife from his pocket and punched a slit in one of the water hoses. Should do it nicely.

Cord went back to camp and slid under his blanket. He smiled a complacent smile.

They woke with the first gleam

of the never-never dawn. In a few minutes they had a fire licking around the billy can, and the sun was bristling over a ridge of red rocks in a china blue sky by the time they were done with breakfast.

"I might as well get an early start," Huffer said. "It's going to be another scorcher."

"Best thing," Cord agreed.

Huffer stood up to say, "Well, I'll just take a minute to run the razor over my face. A rich man such as myself must make a good impression on the townies." He smiled.

Wasn't that just like him, Cord thought with disgust. Any other bush cobber would return to civilization looking like a regular dirt-grained swaggy, and worry about a tidy appearance after he got there. But not little Beau Geste. He had to go in with a fresh dial. But what the hell; it was a nice way to die—clean-shaven. Cord had to turn away to keep from laughing.

"I'll fill the water bag and put it in the truck for you," he said.

"Thanks, Wally."

The poor sap actually thanked him!

Cord took the canvas waterbag over to the round-bottomed Lister bag which hung suspended from a needlewood tripod, and half filled it. He begrudged wasting even that much water. Couldn't be helped though. Huffer might be watching

from the tent. He went down the path to the truck and climbed up in back to suspend the waterbag to the gas-can rack. Then he punched a slit in the bottom seam.

Nobody—if there ever should be an investigation—would notice that any more than they would notice the slit in the water hose. The only possible question would concern the empty gas cans. But Cord could always claim he knew nothing about them. Maybe the truck had a gas leak.

Anything could happen to a man alone on a desert. Everyone knew that.

Huffer, his face as bright and clean as baby skin, met him on the path and put out his hand. "No more damper dough and tea for us, partner," he said, smiling. "Caviar and champagne only."

"That's right, mate," Cord said and he shook hands.

They parted and Cord went on up to camp. He had banged up and down the Back o' Beyond for many

years and had seen the remains of men who had died of thirst out there. It had never been pretty. Just thinking of what was shortly going to happen to Huffer gave him a need for a drink, and he went for the canteen.

It was empty. He knew it the moment he picked it up. He dropped the canteen and ran around to the back of the tent to the Lister bag. The last trickle of water was piddling into the thirsty sand.

*That's why he wanted to shave,* Cord thought. Then he spun on the spot and started running back down the path, yelling.

"Bill! Bill, wait! You're going to kill us both!"

But even as he screamed and ran he knew he was way too late. He could hear the choggity old motor of the truck carrying the complacently smiling Bill Huffer off into the salt bush stubs, as the burning morning sun settled into its fiery red sweep toward the west.

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# Guided Tour

by

**WILLIAM GARVIN**

*Somewhere in that house a dead lady waited. Waited impatiently —for the next one to die . . .*

**A**T FIRST SIGHT the house did not look frightening at all. Anyone could see it was just another forlorn old structure of oak and stone, with a central turret, a slate roof and crumbling, moss-streaked terraces. In appearance at least, it seemed to be as prosaic and peaceful as a dozen other uninhabited country houses they'd passed on the drive from London. And seeing this at the very beginning, they were reassured.

When the wheezing relic of a Rolls finally panted to a halt squarely before the front entrance, there were audible sighs of relief from a couple of the passengers, as if both were thinking the same



thing: *this isn't going to be so bad after all.*

Even Mr. Norton, their driver-guide, contributed to the easing of tension with his first words.

"There she be, folks," he said cheerfully, holding the limousine door open. "Endrayde House herself, and she never claimed no victims yet from her visitors, so don't be scared before we even get inside."

Two of the male passengers smiled dutifully as they stepped out—Randall, the American tire company executive, and the paunchy little professor from Canada named Wilkes—although the latter might have been amused only by Norton's pronunciation.

The third passenger to emerge did not smile. His name was Mr. Sebastian, and he was a tall, startlingly thin man in his mid-thirties with dark eyes and an odd, elusive accent the others had not been able to identify.

"But it looks so—ordinary," said Mrs. Randall, getting out last. "Not at all what I expected."

"And what was that, Madam?" Mr. Sebastian asked.

She gazed at the house. In the deepening twilight it seemed subtly larger than it had only a moment before, with its edges and angles softened and its broad facade bulkier, more substantial.

"Oh, I suppose the conventional haunted house. Bats flying out the windows"—she gestured with

a dramatic sweep of her arm—"and creaking shutters; that sort of thing. This place looks almost ordinary."

Professor Wilkes nodded in agreement. He was conscious of a slight disappointment on his own part. As an occasional student of the occult, he had paid the stiff three-pound fee for this visit and endured an uncomfortable ride in a decrepit automobile in the hope that there would be something rewarding to see—exactly what, he didn't know, but something. Certainly this simple old mausoleum did not promise much. So far, at any rate.

Shrugging, the professor decided to reserve judgment until they actually went inside, but he couldn't shake off a wriggling, needling worry that he had been bilked.

"Let's get this deal started," Randall said.

"Advisable not to go in just yet," Norton said with the deference due a paying customer. "We usually take a nice stroll through the garden. Do a little tour first, all around the outside of the place. A grand tour, you might say. Care to, folks?"

After an instant's hesitation, Randall took his wife's arm.

Five abreast, the group moved toward the left and the west end of the house. For a moment or two no one spoke, and the sole sound was their footsteps crunching across the terrace. As they walked

on, only Mr. Sebastian looked at the house. He kept darting brief speculative glances at the windows, almost as if he expected to see something behind them.

Professor Wilkes cleared his throat. "May I ask why we wait until later to go in?"

"Just until dark, sir."

"But why?"

"Nothing ever happens until then." Norton hesitated. "The spirits, if that's what they really are, just don't show themselves any sooner."

A sardonic expression flickered across Mr. Sebastian's face. "And darkness also provides the appropriate atmosphere."

"I think you've got something there," Randall muttered.

"Stop being cynical, dear," his wife said, giggling.

They were on the lawn now, with soil beneath their feet instead of flagstones.

It was a lawn in name only. The grass was wild and patchy, weeds twisted and curled underfoot, and there was not a single flower to be seen anywhere. Obviously the place had received no care for years. At the far end of the rear lawn stood a group of black, brooding trees, indistinguishable as to their kind in the fading light. It was utterly desolate wherever they looked: a gray and morbid square of ground that had had most of its healthy life seep away through long neglect, leaving only repulsive

growth and the dregs of decap in its place.

It was easy to believe, walking there, that under the crust of the scrubby earth and hidden behind bark and rock lurked ugly molds and insects and God knew what venomous creatures of the night.

By the time they circled the house and returned to the front terrace, the darkness was almost complete and their mood had altered. They understood now why Norton had taken them around; no one could plunge into these surroundings and retain much gaiety.

"Is it time?" the professor asked in a subdued voice.

Norton detached himself from the group a few paces, then turned to face them. He was a small, compact man of fifty or so with blue eyes that managed to look both bored and quizzical.

"All right. We're going in," he said mechanically. "Remember, my employers, Ghostly Tours, do not make any guarantees you'll see spirits or unusual happenings in this house. Also—"

"Have you ever seen ghosts here?" Mr. Sebastian asked him.

"I've seen—ghostlike sights."

"Yeah?" said Randall. "How many times?"

Norton frowned. "Often. But I'm not representin' what I saw as ghosts. Not makin' no claims at all. If you folks see anything, you'll have to judge for yourselves."

He began walking toward the

front door. They followed. Pulling a key from his pocket, he inserted it into the door and opened it. "No sudden movements, please. Try not to talk loud. *And do not attempt under no circumstances to touch or grab whatever you might see.*"

Norton's English, like his pronunciation, was subject to sudden lapses.

They entered the silent darkness. Quickly Norton snapped on a small hooded flashlight, and the five of them eased their way through the bare entrance hall. At the east end of the corridor, double doors, slightly ajar, flanked an opening into more darkness.

Norton paused, then pushed the doors open wider. They went in.

It had been a study or library once, perhaps even a room that had known cheer. Now it was just a void, an unadorned emptiness that smelled of dust. There were no furnishings, no paintings, no carpets, no drapes. Faint, grayish oblongs to the right indicated where the narrow windows were, and the flashlight's feeble gleam next played over what appeared to be a long-dead fireplace.

In this dismal room they were going to have to wait—the prospect was much more unpleasant than they would have thought possible only a half hour ago—and by an unuttered agreement they all gravitated toward the fireplace,

prudently turning around to keep watch on the double doors.

"Hope you won't mind being on your feet a bit," Norton said quietly.

"I couldn't sit anyway," Mrs. Randall murmured.

Mr. Sebastian, his eyes narrowed in the gloom, seemed intensely interested in the room itself and examined as much of it as was possible in the dim light. The flooring, the ceiling, the blank walls—

"How many rooms are there in this place?" he asked suddenly.

"Eighteen, I believe, sir."

"And how long has it been unoccupied?"

Norton didn't answer at once. He aimed his flashlight at the floor across the room, just inside the doorway. It made a pale oval of light in the gloom.

"Some years. I've forgotten the exact number. Why do you ask?"

Mr. Sebastian made no reply.

"Could you tell us what happened here, Mr. Norton?" It was Mrs. Randall's voice, hushed now and nervous.

"Yes, tell us," the professor added. "Your associates at the Ghostly Tours office mentioned something about a man murdering his wife with a—"

"With poison. He's supposed to have put it in water she drank. The people who bought this house later from his estate began to see, uh, the apparition of him bringing her

the glass. She was said to be waiting in this room, and—well, they'd sometimes see him coming down the corridor."

"The apparition?" Randall said. "Is that what you've seen here?"

"I don't know what it was," Norton said defensively.

How careful he is, Mr. Sebastian thought. Never quite comes out with a claim, only implies it. Always stays in the neutral zone between the credible and the bizarre.

Mr. Sebastian's eyes narrowed. Soon he intended to find out the real truth for himself, no matter what Norton did or said.

"—happened to the murderer?" Mrs. Randall was whispering.

"Oh, I don't believe he was ever caught, ma'am. They say the bloke escaped to the Continent."

"Why did he poi—" Her voice choked off in an abrupt gasp.

Somewhere in that night-black house a door had creaked. They all heard it.

"What the hell was *that*?" Randall said thickly after a moment.

In the dimness Norton shook his head. The group fell into a taut silence, sliced only by their strained breathing.

*What, indeed?* Mr. Sebastian waited in alert expectancy. Was it a contrived sound effect? Or something else? He glanced sideways at the dark forms of his companions and felt a sharp throb of contempt.

He was so far beyond them, so remote, so superior . . .

The professor with his amateur's interest and academic sense of shame about that very interest, something to be hidden from his professional colleagues back home. The American couple, she predictably suggestible, and he all swelling fright behind his bluster, although he would never admit it. And Norton. The paid employee, playing his role with just the right amount of innuendo and commercial bonhomie, but still somehow an unknown quantity.

They were such blundering novices, so superficial in their responses, so ridiculously normal. Way out of their depths in these surroundings, of course. Even if there were—other things here, they wouldn't understand what it meant, what it meant to him. Unless Norton himself . . .

"Down the hall," Mrs. Randall whispered.

They stiffened and looked, eyes boring into the blackness.

"What was it?" Professor Wilkes asked. "I can't see anything."

She was too near total fright to answer; they could sense her trembling. Randall moved closer and put his arm around her.

"Shine that light down the hall, Mr. Norton," the professor said somewhat sharply. "What good is it aimed at the floor?"

"Oh, no, sir, I'd rather not."

"But why?"

"Wouldn't be advisable. I've been here before, sir, you know."

"Well?"

"Wise not to bother whatever's there. If there is something."

The professor looked meaningfully at Mr. Sebastian as if to establish a united front with him against Norton; then, noticing not even a muscle-quiver of sympathetic reaction, he turned away, shaking his head peevishly.

"Not exactly a very scientific approach, is it? What do you expect us to see, standing here like statues gaping into a cave? Three pounds—I didn't pay three pounds to take eye exercises."

Although angry, the professor remained in full control of himself: he was careful to keep his voice down.

"I'm sorry, sir," Norton said calmly. "But I'm not going to lift this torch one bloody bit. In fact, I have a good mind to put it out entirely. Look now, folks," he went on in the same unhurried tone. "Can you see it?"

Mr. Sebastian tensed. He had caught a glimpse of something, something faintly luminous that danced around the edges of his vision just for an instant before vanishing. A feverish spasm shook him. What if this house *really* was? What if he had dragged his way through a dozen countries on two continents, to find *this*?

"Oh, God," Mrs. Randall quavered.

"Steady, ma'am." Norton switched off his flashlight.

And now they all saw it distinctly, moving toward them through the long corridor. It had the blurry outline of a human shape without limbs, a grotesque glowing torso. Its motion was odd. The thing did not seem to be either walking or floating, but rather jerking forward in an almost hesitant way; nor did it appear to be touching the floor, although it was so dark they couldn't be sure of that.

Yet its advance was steady despite the convulsive movements.

"Thorpe, for God's sake don't let it come in here," Mrs. Randall whispered, clinging to her husband. Undoubtedly she would have fled if the thing had not been in the corridor, blocking the only way out.

"Probably won't," Norton said, pitching his voice to a normal level in order to calm her.

"What?" her husband asked.

"It probably won't come in."

The dark bulk that was the Randalls shuddered a little.

"What if it does?" one of them said.

"Don't move. Don't move or talk."

It was only about twenty feet from the doorway now, and they realized that it was not becoming clearer and more distinct as it neared them; the thing remained a hazy phosphorescence without detail, shape, form. It was bigger, but no more identifiable. It looked like

nothing on earth. And it made no sound at all.

"Fascinating." Staring, the professor was awed and exultant. "But what the devil is it?"

They saw that it was between five and six feet in height. It seemed to have substance. There was a suggestion, a shadow behind its glowing surface, a shadowy aura of something tangible, something that could be grasped. But they still could not be positive; the thing was much too nebulous, as difficult to pin down as quicksilver.

Mrs. Randall whimpered.

"Stop it," her husband murmured hoarsely.

Mr. Sebastian's eyes were following its progress like an avid leech, never relaxing their grip. He was leaning forward in his eagerness to study it, lips drawn back against his teeth.

Suddenly he nodded. His lips loosened and formed a kind of smile. Then he straightened.

"Have you received your money's worth now, Professor Wilkes?" he asked in that oddly accented voice.

Wilkes looked at him, puzzled. "Yes. Yes, I have."

Mr. Sebastian's saturnine features shifted into a smirk of amusement. "You are mistaken, sir. You have not had full value for your three pounds. So far. But you shall, you shall." His teeth glistened in the dark.

"What are you talking about?" Norton asked Sebastian, obviously irritated.

He paid no attention. The thing was fake, he was sure of it now. And a rather amateurish kind of fake at that. The flashlight signals, phosphorous paint, trained employee inside the black cloth sack, scrupulously tied around the ankles and resulting in those jerky forward movements . . . Relief swept through him. He was free to take over, this virgin territory was his.

He shook with excitement. No one knew better than he how ferociously selfish the spirits were about big old mansions; they'd forced him out of house after house on three continents, houses he had discovered, only because he preferred to operate as a single. But this wonderful place was so remote and so recently available that it might take years before any of the others found out about it.

Mrs. Randall screamed as Mr. Sebastian dematerialized. They all stood frozen in terror, staring at him for an awful moment longer. Then the group fled down the corridor and out of the house, followed by a clumsy, frantic, hobbling figure inside a black bag.

But the creature that had been called Mr. Sebastian didn't even notice. It was floating from room to room in quiet ecstasy, inspecting its new quarters.

# A Matter of Patience

An unfaithful wife, he told himself, deserves a hard life . . . an even harder death.

by NORMAN DANIELS

LEO DAMION had smoked his second cigar before the couple emerged from the motel and he saw the man help the woman into the sleek, fire-engine-red sports



car which had been parked outside the cabin.

His rage was the quiet kind for the moment, but the most dangerous kind because the woman was his wife and he'd warned her before about this sort of thing.

He wouldn't have blamed her if she'd had an unhappy marriage with him. In their thirteen years together, he'd provided well. As a successful manufacturer, he'd made sufficient money to keep her in mink coat, cape and stole. Her perfumes were imported and her dresses came from only the best couturiers.

He had provided a nine room, three-and-a-half-bath ranch-suburban home which was as nice a place as the whole section boasted of. She had her own car, a by-the-day maid and a laundress. He took her to the best restaurants and night clubs. If they didn't make first night at the theatre, they were there the second.

All in all, Leo Damion thought he'd done very well for Jean and she showed her appreciation by going out with other men.

She wasn't getting away with it. The first one—Charlie Hoyt, a young lawyer who'd been struggling to find a couple of clients—she'd been out with him several times, he knew.

Leo had suffered in silence, but no man could be expected to endure that forever, so Leo had done something about it. The way things

turned out, he was very proud of the way he'd handled it.

Now he looked as if he were going to be required to go through it all again. He would be careful though, just as careful as he'd been with Charlie. Getting rid of a person wasn't as difficult or dangerous as he'd believed.

It was merely a matter of patience until the right time, and then speed and strength. Leo bit the tip off a third cigar and smiled. Speed was a matter to be induced at the moment he struck; strength he already had far more than enough of.

He drove home, stopping at a bar for a couple of drinks. He made certain Jean was back before he returned. She was in the living room, already dressed in a lounging robe with her hair in curlers, and a significant lack of warmth predominated her greeting.

"Why Leo, I didn't expect you this early."

"And how did you spend the evening, my dear?"

"How do I spend all my evenings when you're not at home? Looking at television, reading—"

He loosened his tie and unlaced his right shoe because it hurt across the instep. "Of course I know you're lying," he said.

Her expression didn't change. "Have you been following me again, Leo?" she asked in a matter-of-fact voice. It was her utter lack of fear that infuriated him.

"The Brick Cellar for dinner," he related. "An unsavory, cheap place. Your new friend must be very frugal."

"Not as frugal as poor," she corrected.

"I see. Well then, there was a ride to the King's Manor Motel with a long stop on a lonely road first. Am I doing well, my dear?"

"You're accurate enough," she admitted. "What do you intend to do about it, Leo?"

He wasn't feeling the liquor he'd drunk at the bar, so he poured himself a double shot and made a short highball for Jean. She didn't touch it.

He returned to his chair and sat down slowly, regarding her with quiet contemplation.

"Of course you remember Charlie?" he asked.

"Of course."

"I killed him, you know."

For a moment he thought he was going to draw a reaction of fear because she sucked in a quick breath and was quite noisy about it. Her eyes too, went very large and looked down at her silly oversized, imitation-fur-lined slippers. He'd hoped for more than that, but he was willing to settle for what he'd gotten. The real fear would come later.

"Yes," she said, "I thought you did, Leo. Though I must say I didn't think you'd admit it."

"Im safe enough, Jean. I'm not afraid of what you might do."

She did take a drink then, and it gratified Leo very much. He waited politely until she set the glass down again.

"Killing him was very easy," he said, without bragging.

"Charlie was such a small man in comparison to you and quite without half your strength, Leo. I believe he must have been easy to kill. You strangled him, didn't you?"

"The method is known to the police as mugging."

"Yes, they said he was the victim of some cheap mugger. Leo, are you going to kill this new man also?"

"Of course I am. He's encroaching upon my property, isn't he?"

"I dislike being referred to as property, Leo."

"I beg your pardon," he said with a trace of sarcasm. "I stand corrected."

"You might be tempting fate, you know."

"I've tempted Fate in everything I've ever done. When I ran guns in the Middle East and the Orient. I tempted her when I established myself in a legitimate business. Both times Fate treated me very well for my risks."

"Only in you did she turn away from me. I'm older than you. I'm quite ugly, I suppose, but I am sufficiently educated and I dress well and I have a way about me that permits me to get by in the places where my money doesn't count."

Those are few and far between, but I do get by there. You, of course, are an exceedingly attractive woman. I understand why men seek you out."

"Why don't you just let me go, Leo? It would be so much easier and there'd be no risk."

"I prefer to handle this in my own way. Your Charlie—that great lover—was an attorney, wasn't he?"

"Yes, he was a lawyer."

"He should have known better than to trespass, then. He died rather quickly. Would you like to hear about it, my dear?"

"I would not, but I'm quite sure I'll have to endure it, Leo."

He shook his head sorrowfully. "If you would only be as considerate and wise in your other dealings, Jean. I followed you and Charlie that night. You went to his office, long after hours and you stayed there right through the dinner hour. You and Charlie ate quite late that evening, if you remember. I waited outside."

"Oh," she asked. "Were you hungry, Leo? I hope you were."

"Yes, I was, and getting angrier by the minute. But then, you and Charlie obliged me. He drove you home and then he returned to town, put his car in the public garage where he always kept it. He worried me a bit at that moment because, instead of going directly home, he stopped at a bar. I had a drink with him. He wasn't a bad

sort, if you like the quiet, withdrawn kind.

"I even paid for the drink and we discussed—what do you think? —opera. He was quite a fan, which surprised me somewhat. Well, he then obliged me by going home through the alley he invariably used. I followed him and it didn't make any difference if he saw me."

"Did you tell him you were going to murder him, Leo?" she asked. "Of course you did. It heightened the drama of the moment, didn't it? You most certainly would have told him."

He wagged his head again. "You know me so well—and so little, Jean. It's really a pity."

"I'm quite tired," she said. "I wish you'd get through the gory details which you insist I hear. Then let me go to bed."

"There isn't very much to tell. I followed him, as I told you. Halfway along the alley he heard me and he grew alarmed, I suppose. At any rate, he stopped and was going to do battle. Can you imagine a man his size going to do battle with one my size?

"But then he recognized me and he relaxed. That was when I seized him and twisted him around and curled my arm about his throat. I told him who I was as I applied the necessary pressure. It required about five minutes altogether. I robbed him because I wanted to make it look like the work of a cheap mugger and I threw his wrist-

watch into an empty van which passed me by some time later. I returned to the cafe where I'd met Charlie and I spent his money there. I bought drinks for everyone."

"He would have liked that," she said without emotion.

"Then I'm sorry I did it. When I kill your present boy friend, I shall spend his money on some selfish thing."

"You intend to keep this up? Kill all the men I meet, Leo?"

"No," Leo said. "He will be the last."

She seemed surprised. "You believe I'll be sufficiently cured by then?"

"I doubt you ever will be, Jean. A girl as beautiful as you will be a natural target for charming men and you are easily charmed. So it would happen again and again. But I won't let it."

"I don't understand how you will stop something you admit is inevitable, Leo. Eventually you're bound to make a slip and be caught."

"I came to that conclusion myself when you took this new man into your life. I intend to kill him, but there will be no others because I intend to kill you too."

The ice in the glass she held clinked as her hand shook in one tremor of fear. He didn't miss it and he loved it. Under that chilly exterior she was scared to death.

"You'll find it difficult," she



promised him. "Together we'd make a formidable defense against you."

"Oh, but it won't be together. I wish I could arrange that, but I'm not a fool, Jean. I'm also a man who doesn't care to overexert myself in a matter which doesn't require it. A simple little matter of murder. And then it will be your turn. You may retire now. Sleep well, my darling."

She walked calmly across the spacious room and he watched her, liking the swing to her gait, reluctantly admitting to himself that he wasn't man enough to hold a girl like this. She climbed the staircase to the second floor, not hurrying, being as graceful about it as a cat. He thought it was all a great pity and he had another drink before going to bed. He rested very well.

Jean did not. She locked the door of her room and sat down on the bed for a moment before she threw herself across the satin spread and wept. She did it quietly, because he'd have derived so much satisfaction from hearing her. It was no easy thing to hold back, to let him know how much she had liked Charlie Hoyt, to betray her anger and terror over his murder and the callous way Leo described it.

Right from the first, she'd known Leo had killed him. Charlie hadn't been so stupid that he didn't know that Leo was following them, but he didn't know Leo personally, had never even seen him at close range, so it was very likely that Leo had bought him a drink in macabre delight just before he murdered him.

Now Leo was going to kill Ted, then murder her. He was so sure of himself, of his competence as a killer. The sad part of it was the fact that he had gotten away with killing Charlie and his confidence made him dangerous.

The police would never believe her story if she went to them. Leo was too well known as a kind and honorable man. Also, in making such a charge she'd leave herself open to censure.

Leo would probably once again resort to the use of his enormous strength and size to kill Ted. It had worked so well with Charlie that he was bound to adopt the same safe, proven method. Besides, there'd been a series of muggings

over the past two years and Leo was taking advantage of a situation, which was just like him.

She had no doubt but that he would then kill her. Not before Ted was dead, however. He'd want to boast about that and watch her go to pieces as she knew the same thing was about to happen to her.

There was much physical strength about Leo, but there were certain weaknesses in his character makeup. She would have to take advantage of these if she wanted to live—and she did. She feared death. Leo literally terrorized her.

She hadn't slept well in weeks, ever since she realized Leo had been following her and Charlie. This couldn't continue much longer or she'd give herself away, or make an idiot of herself by going to the police.

She slept badly again that night, but in the morning she pretended to be fast asleep and breathed heavily when she heard Leo's footsteps pause outside her door.

A lock wouldn't stop him if he wanted to come in, but Leo had his office to maintain and he insisted upon keeping up a reputation for reliability. It set a fine example for his employees. Besides, he would prefer to torture her with his threats in the evening, when he had more time and was more relaxed.

When she heard the rear door close and the whir of his car starter, she felt an easing of tension and she did go to sleep.

It was afternoon when she awakened. She showered, dressed and then went downstairs. It was the maid's day off, so she made her own combination breakfast and lunch. After she did the dishes, she telephoned Ted and made a date to meet him on the corner of East and Hanover Streets at nine-thirty.

For the sake of formality, Leo telephoned her at five and said he would be very late getting home because of a pressure of business. Sometimes he told the truth about that, and she had no way of knowing if he was lying tonight.

Leo was lying. He worked later than usual, that was true, but only to kill time. He had two sandwiches and a quart of coffee sent in. By seven-thirty he was ready to leave. He removed all personal possessions from his pockets. Too often some object was left at the scene of a murder through sheer carelessness. He slipped into his dark gray topcoat, adjusted his hat to a rakish angle which gave him a less pugnacious look.

He drove toward his home, parked down a dark lane just off the road and waited. When Jean drove by in the red sports car, Leo followed at a considerable distance. She turned down Hanover, finally. It was a quiet side street and he strongly suspected she would pick up Ted along here.

As Jean's brake lights suddenly flashed and she pulled in toward the curb, Leo made a casual turn

off the avenue three blocks behind her and parked until she returned, this time with a man beside her.

Unfortunately, Leo knew very little about Ted. He didn't know his name and had no idea where he lived or what his occupation might be. He did know that he could very easily overpower him at any time he chose. It might be tonight, if conditions warranted it, or next time they met.

He stayed well behind as Jean crossed town again and headed toward a highway. He chuckled when they stopped at a drive-in. Ted obviously wasn't any more affluent or generous than good old Charlie had been.

Leo remained parked alongside the highway and close enough so that he could smell the tantalizing aroma of the hot dogs and hamburgers dispensed in great quantities by the place. He was glad they'd selected a drive-in that busy, it was easier for him to keep them under constant observation without being seen himself.

After half an hour they drove off. This time, under the lights of the drive-in, Leo had a fairly good look at the man with her. He wasn't as young as Charlie had been, but physically about the same size. He'd offer no appreciable resistance. Leo felt quite content with things in general.

Killing Jean would be something else. He had no idea how he'd accomplish that. She was close to him

and he'd automatically be involved, so he'd have to be most careful.

There was no great hurry anyway. Jean knew the futility of going to the police. He was too well known, too respected; they'd believe whatever story he countered hers with.

The red car was slowing up and suddenly it turned off into one of those small, unappealing motel courts. He hated her very much at that moment because she made the thing so cheap and tawdry.

There was really no point to waiting here. They might be hours, although he suspected she'd try to return home before he got there. However, she'd drop the man off at the same spot where she'd met him. She usually made a point of this and there was no reason to believe she'd do it any differently tonight.

He drove back to Third and Hanover, found a likely spot to park and settled down to wait. He was well supplied with his usual light-colored cigars. He smoked quietly and once he extended his arm to see if he was afflicted with any sign of tremors. His fingertips were steady as those of a statue. He felt quite proud of himself; he rather hoped Jean's new man-in-her-life would present Leo with a favorable chance of killing him tonight.

Leo had no fear of consequences. It was all so simple when an intelligent man used his head. Of course



if Jean hadn't been quite so stupid and frightened, he might have run into trouble, but she worried him none at all. The best she could do was make accusations he would sadly refute, and she'd have absolutely no evidence to back up her fantasy.

They were later than usual tonight. He was fretting by eleven-thirty, and growing angry, which was a sensation he didn't enjoy. It might make him too eager, too willing to risk chances in order to kill the man while he felt this way. He tried to regain his former calmness, but it was difficult to do and then he knew why his anger was so possessive.

Jean wasn't trying to deceive him any longer. If she returned home after he did, she obviously didn't care if he knew it.

His anger increased as he thought about this new factor, and when her car finally passed the spot where he was hidden and swung to the curb at the corner, Leo was in a state of high rage.

He heard her laugh. It seemed merry and bright and the man said something to her that made her laugh again. Leo crouched down and waited until she made the turn at the corner and headed back to pass his hiding place once more.

He left the lights off, waited until she was gone a few moments and then pulled out into the street and looked for the man. He spotted him walking slowly down Third

Street, which was one of those streets which are paved, have sidewalks, but few houses and many vacant lots. The spot was absolutely ideal and the time was most favorable.

He drove on by the man who didn't seem worried or in a hurry. Leo stopped two blocks away, turned the corner, parked, waited and brooded and grew angrier and angrier.

The man was approaching and he was whistling softly as if he didn't have a care in the world. Suddenly Leo stepped out to confront him and, as he did so, his rage grew overpowering. He would tantalize the man, he'd tell him why he was doing this, but not until he had him firmly held and the man was slowly dying.

The man came to an abrupt stop as Leo charged toward him. But then he did a strange thing. He seemed to brace himself and suddenly he reached under his coat. Leo was moving too fast to stop, to even think.

It suddenly flashed across his mind that the man had drawn a gun. A gun! What business did a man like him have in carrying a weapon?

Leo kept on going. The gun levelled.

Leo screamed his rage. He saw the gun flash, he felt the shock of the bullet as it hit, but the pain was almost non-existent because he died practically on the instant as

the heavy slug ripped through his chest and then his heart.

To an excited and somewhat frightened householder who dared to approach the scene, the man with the gun still in his hand, also produced a gold badge.

"I'm Detective Sergeant Ted Barnes," he said. "I live a block away. Call police headquarters and tell them I was just compelled to shoot a man. I'll wait here."

"Is he—in need of an ambulance, Sergeant?"

"Not this one," Sergeant Barnes said. "He must have been crazy, coming at me that way."

Sergeant Barnes told the simple story to his captain a little while later.

"I'd been working on that Jean Damion blackmail thing. Mrs. Damion and I went out again on word she got from the blackmailer, but just like the other times, he didn't show."

The captain looked down at the dead man, now decently covered with a blanket. "Maybe this is the blackmailer. Somehow, he found out you were a cop—"

"Could be. Nothing on him in the way of identification and, believe me, Captain, there was murder in his eyes."

"Well, we'll have an explanation as soon as we find out who he is. No progress at all with the Damion blackmailer?"

"None. I'm beginning to think it's all a hoax. Not by Mrs. Damion. She's just about one of the finest women I've ever met."

"Beautiful too," the Captain said. "Some of the other boys in the office think you're mighty lucky."

Sergeant Barnes walked toward the police car.

"I'll stop at my home and tell my wife everything's okay," he said. "Then I'll go down and make a report. I wish I could put into it the reason why this confounded idiot attacked me."

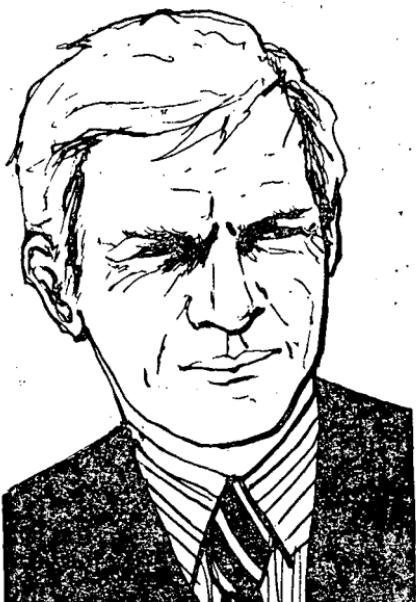
"It all washes out eventually," the captain said. "You run along. Oh yes, you might phone Mrs. Damion and tell her we're going to put a new man on her case. You'll be too busy working up this one, I'm afraid."

"I'd appreciate the change, Captain. Sitting around cheap motels and drive-ins gets monotonous after awhile. Even with a beautiful and interesting woman."

"I hope Mrs. Damion won't be disappointed at the news." The captain kidded him a bit.

Mrs. Damion wasn't disappointed. There might be some questions later on when they found out it was her husband Ted had killed, but she was sure she could cope with any investigation. For tonight, she was content.

She went to bed and slept very well indeed.



# TEN LONG YEARS

*"You will tell me where the money is. Now. Or—" He saw the cane in the big man's hand . . .*

by

**Richard  
Hill  
Wilkinson**

SIDNEY SCHLIFF'S hobby was studying the stock market. It fascinated him. Over a period of two years, by making careful investments, buying and selling at the right time, he made a little more than two million dollars. On paper, that is.

It was fun, and exciting.

At the end of this two-year period Sidney felt that he was ready to begin a bit of jumping in and out for real. He first jumped into Allied Plastics, and lost two thousand dollars within three weeks because he didn't jump out at the proper time. Sidney shrugged off the loss. So he'd made a miscalculation. So what? It

wasn't his money he'd lost. It was the bank's.

Sidney worked in the bookkeeping department of the Bomont First National Bank and Trust Company. It was easy for him to juggle the books around so that the discrepancy wouldn't be discovered, at least for the time being. And long before the "time being" had expired Sidney would have jumped in and out again and replaced the amount of the first loss.

For example, Sidney had his eye on Fairbanks Steel. Apparently Fairbanks Steel had its eye on Sidney, because the day after he waded in with a three thousand dol-

lar investment, Fairbanks stock plunged to an all time low.

This shook him up. He couldn't understand why things weren't working out for him as they had when he was only a paper investor. He was now five grand in the hole and the bank's books were giving him an uncomfortable feeling every time he opened them. They seemed to screech at him to restore the money he had stolen.

Sidney studied the market for another week and then, convinced that his system couldn't fail a third time, decided to take the plunge. He "borrowed" another ten thousand dollars from the bank and nailed it on Melrose Chemicals. Melrose Chemicals had no sympathy or understanding whatever. Ten days later they folded. Sidney's—or the bank's—ten thousand bucks vanished, never to be heard from again.

Sidney was now beset by a feeling he had never before known. It was a feeling of panic. Desperately he scanned the stock market reports. Brown Electronics looked good. It looked extremely good. It was a comparatively new company and had moved steadily forward since its inception. But was it worth the risk?

Sidney thought about it. Despite his careful calculations he had failed three times. The bank examiners were due any day. They would detect the discrepancies at a glance and point the finger of guilt

at him. He'd be arrested, tried and convicted. He'd be sent to jail for ten years, with three years off for good behavior.

Sidney shuddered. Then he had a great idea. If he was going to be sent to jail anyway, why not be sent for something worth while?

The next day was Friday and Sidney arrived at the bank with an empty suitcase. He told everyone he was leaving right after the bank closed for a week-end with some friends in New Hampshire.

Sidney was a long-time and trusted employee. One of his duties was to check the cash in the vault at the end of each business day. Thus it took no great scheming for him to fill his suitcase with stacks of currency, amounting to a quarter of a million dollars, without arousing suspicion. The theft couldn't possibly be discovered until the vault was opened on Monday.

At six o'clock he left the bank, carrying the now rather heavy suitcase, and climbed into his car. But he didn't head for New Hampshire. Instead he headed for the Bomont Airport.

On Monday Sidney was late in getting to work. It was early afternoon when he finally stepped through the door of the bank. He was promptly seized by two plain-clothes officers and hustled off to jail.

In high school and later in college Sidney had engaged in ama-

teur theatrics. He considered himself a fairly good performer. He proved it now. To all of the questions, accusations and threats that were hurled at him he replied with shock, disbelief, wonder and indignation.

The interrogated him for hours, but it didn't do any good. Sidney claimed he was innocent. Not only innocent but shocked that the bank could think him guilty of such a heinous crime.

He didn't care what the books showed. Someone must have forged his handwriting. Of course he couldn't tell them where he'd hidden the money. How could he when he didn't have it to hide?

And so at last they gave up. They charged him formally with the crime. He was tried in court, convicted and given a ten-year prison sentence. But they didn't get him to tell where he'd hidden the money. How could he, he protested to the bitter end, when he didn't have the money to hide?

This, of course, was not the end of the matter. How could it be with a quarter of a million dollars stashed away somewhere and so many people wondering about its location? Two weeks after Sidney was incarcerated in Hayden State Prison he was summoned to the office of the captain of the guards. The captain's name was Jack Manners, a brute of a man with a deceptively soft voice.

Sidney stood at attention before

the captain's desk and waited for the man to speak. The man took a long time to do so. He looked Sidney over with an expression that seemed to be no more than idle curiosity. Then he picked up the cane that was lying on his desk and began caressing it fondly.

"You," the captain said presently, "don't look like a man capable of stealing a quarter of a million dollars."

"Thank you, sir. You're the first to believe me when I say I didn't steal it."

Captain Manners laughed softly. "As captain of the guards here at Hayden, it is within my power to make an inmate's stay pleasant or miserable. I assume, Mr. Schliff, that you would like your stay here to be made as pleasant as possible."

Sidney swallowed hard. "Yes, sir." Suddenly he felt cold inside. He was beginning to get the drift of what was coming.

"Naturally." Captain Manners stroked the smooth cylinder of the cane more rapidly. He got up, came around the desk and sat on its edge. He was within a few feet of where Sidney stood. "In that case, Mr. Schliff, I think I can arrange it."

"Thank you, sir."

"All you have to do is tell me where the money is hidden." He paused. "Half of it will be waiting for you when your time is up. The other half will be in payment for

my efforts in making your stay here pleasant."

Sidney swallowed again. "But, sir, you've already told me that you believed I didn't steal the money."

"Naturally you can't have any idea how unpleasant I can make life here for you at Hayden. I should have first given you a sample. I shall do so now."

The cane swished through the air and caught Sidney a stinging blow on the cheek. A red welt appeared. Sidney yelped and leaped away.

The captain pushed a button on his desk, then swung around and clouted Sidney on the jaw. Sidney dropped with a crash. The captain strode over and kicked him brutally in the ribs.

At that moment the door burst open and two guards came rushing in.

"Did you ring, Captain?"

"And barely in time," Manners growled. "This fool attacked me. Throw him in the hole."

Sidney spent five days in the hole. There was nothing to do but nurse his wounds and think. It occurred to him that as long as so many people suspected that he had a quarter of a million dollars stashed away he'd be hounded for the rest of his life. It wasn't a pleasant prospect.

He had seven long years to serve here at Hayden and, if he were any judge of men, Captain Manners wouldn't abandon his determina-

tion to make him reveal the hiding place of the money.

And after the seven years were up, what then? The police would still be curious. And then there were the hoodlums and the gangsters.

Sidney shuddered. He couldn't stand physical pain, and he knew that hoodlums and gangsters had their methods of making a man talk.

Sidney took a deep breath. He had an out. But could he take what was in store for him for the next seven years? Was it going to be worth it? Sidney decided that it was.

Captain Manners was a stubborn man and relentless. The more Sidney held out on him the more determined he became. It was only when Sidney actually seemed on the verge of death that he relented.

Sidney spent more time in the hole than he did in his cell. He had to subsist on the most meager of diets. He was given the most menial of tasks to be performed in the prison workshops. Beatings with the cane became almost a weekly routine. He was tricked into making it seem that he was trying to escape, and spent a full month in the hole.

But Sidney didn't break. He had a vision and he kept it in front of him at all times. It sustained him.

The worst blow, the one that was hardest to take, came at the end of the seven years. He was brought up

before the parole board. Captain Manners' report on Sidney was passed from hand to hand, read by each member. They exchanged glances and nodded of one accord. Sidney was refused a parole.

Sidney almost broke then. Almost, but not quite. Not even after a session that night in the captain's office with the cane. No, he'd endured seven hellish years. He could endure another three. And he did.

When the doors finally opened for him Sidney stepped into the outside world a mere shadow of the man he'd been ten years before. He stood for a minute looking around him, looking across the street into a vacant lot that extended for some distance without any fences, watching the traffic that passed in front of him. Across the way three automobiles were parked against the curb. Two of them were occupied, a single man behind each wheel. Both were watching him steadily.

Sidney sighed, shifted his suitcase to his left hand and moved along the street toward a bus stop. From the corner of his eye he saw the occupants of the parked cars start up their motors. A bus swung in at the curb and Sidney stepped aboard. Before settling himself in a rear seat, he glanced through the window. Both of the automobiles were idling along after the bus.

Sidney sighed again, leaned

back his head and closed his eyes. Ten years ago he hadn't thought it would be like this. He hadn't looked this far ahead. He had thought that after he'd served his time, paid his debt to society, he'd be allowed to go free, left alone.

Now he realized that he'd never be left alone again, never have any



privacy. He'd be watched day and night. He might even be kidnaped and "persuaded" to tell where he'd hidden the money.

He should have planned the robbery more carefully. He should have made it seem at least possible that someone else had stolen the money. But no. He had been so sure of how things would work out that he had blatantly gone ahead, made no effort to cover his trail nor made an attempt to cast suspicion on anyone else—and then practically turned himself in by returning to the scene of the crime.

Sidney spent the next three days in a cheap rooming house. Whenever he went out, no matter the time of day or night, he saw the men. They were lounging in doorways, standing on street corners, sitting in parked cars. No matter where he went, he was always fol-

lowed. He began to think that everyone was on his trail.

Toward the end of the third day the germ of an idea began to form in Sidney's mind. He spent an almost sleepless night. He awoke early. The germ had come into full bloom.

Relaxed for the first time in days, he ate a leisurely breakfast at a nearby restaurant, then stepped into a cab and ordered the driver to take him to police headquarters. He knew that he was being followed, that he was being watched. But now he didn't care.

Now suddenly the future looked bright.

Lieutenant Marvin Kennessy of the central police force was a big man, red headed, craggy-faced, intelligent. He was a veteran of twenty years, having worked his way up from cop on the beat.

He sat now staring at the man sitting across the desk from him with an almost incredulous look on his face.

"Sidney Schliff? It's hard to believe."

"It's me all right, Lieutenant," Sidney said.

"Looks as though they gave you a pretty rough time up at Hayden."

"They did."

Lieutenant Kennessy wrinkled his forehead. "Well, a criminal can't expect to be treated with gloved hands, especially one who continually seemed to be looking for trouble." He spread his hands.

"But that's not in my department. What was it you wanted to see me about, Schliff?"

"I want to return the quarter of a million dollars I stole."

There was a moment of silence. Lieutenant Kennessy let the match he had lighted to fire up his pipe burn until it toasted his fingers. Then he shook it out.

"So at last you admit having stolen the money?"

"I do."

"And now, having served time for the crime, you want to give the money back. It doesn't make sense."

"It didn't to me when I planned the robbery ten years ago. I thought that after I'd served my time I'd be let alone. I thought I'd—well, I thought I'd be able to enjoy the money. Ten years isn't too long to wait for a quarter of a million dollars."

"And now you've discovered it isn't going to work out that way." The lieutenant hesitated, lighting his pipe. "I don't know what your angle is. You're safe in assuming you won't be sent back to jail again whether or not you return the money. You've paid the score once."

"I'm aware of that."

"So. Why return the money?"

Sidney sat forward in his chair. "Lieutenant, for ten years I haven't had a moment's privacy. I've been beaten and humiliated and tricked into doing things that I never intended doing. The only privacy

I'd had has been during the months I've spent in the stinking black hole. Only a man who has served time in prison can know what a precious commodity privacy is."

Sidney paused and the lieutenant said, "Go on."

"Since the moment I stepped through the prison gates I've been followed, watched. I don't know whether those following me were your men or if they were hoodlums. But I do know that I'll be followed and watched and harrassed and perhaps beaten again for the rest of my days unless I return the money."

Lieutenant Kennessy nodded. "You know right, son. You'll be under surveillance every minute of every day and night. You'll never be able to enjoy a nickel of that money."

He paused, studying Sidney closely. "You were willing to sell ten years of your life for a quarter of a million dollars, and now you want to buy back what remains of your years for the same quarter of a million?"

"That's about what it amounts to."

"All right." The lieutenant stood up. "You're being smart. You've figured the right angle. Where's the money?"

Sidney shook his head. "It isn't as easy as that."

"Oh?"

"I'll get the money. I'll deliver it here to you. Call off your watch

dogs. Make sure I'm not followed."

The lieutenant uttered a short laugh. "Now there's one for the book. You want me to give you a chance to pick up the loot and then disappear from sight. Don't be a fool."

"I'm not being a fool. You know I couldn't get away with a stunt like that. I'll give you time to alert every police force in the country. You can stake out every railroad station, plane and bus terminal, steamship line and highway. You know I couldn't get through a dragnet like that."

Kennessy took a turn around the room, came back and stood looking down at Sidney.

"You must have a reason for not wanting us to pick up the money. What is it?"

"I don't believe you'd understand, Lieutenant." Sidney hesitated. "I'd like to see the money again, count it, handle it. After all, it's the end of a dream for me."

"And you think you could resist a possible urge to take off for parts unknown?"

"Be reasonable, Lieutenant. If I did that I'd be hounded worse than I am now."

Kennessy uttered his short, barking laugh. "Brother, this is one I can tell my grandchildren. Suppose I don't go along with the gag?"

Sidney shrugged. "Then the money stays where it is." His eyes narrowed. "Be quite a feather in your cap if you could return the

quarter of a million to the bank, wouldn't it, Lieutenant."

"And all you want is to be left alone for the rest of your life? You'll pay a quarter of a million dollars for the privilege?"

"Yes. When I return the money here I want you to notify every news service in the city. I want pictures published of me returning the loot. I want the public to know that there's no longer a reason for anyone to dog my footsteps from now on."

"Thought it all out, eh?"

"I tried to."

The lieutenant took a deep breath. He started to speak, checked himself, then stood up. "All right. I don't seem to have any alternative. You can stay here for the next three days while I pass the word. We'll rig up some kind of disguise for you. On the morning of the fourth day we'll turn you loose. On the fifth day I'll expect you back here with the money. And I warn you—you'd better show."

"I'll show," Sidney said. "You can count on it." He sighed. "It'll be worth it to live like a free man, even though I'm broke."

Three months later, on board the jet liner that was taking him to Europe on the first leg of a luxury world tour, Sidney struck up a speaking acquaintance with his seat companion. The man, whose name was Michale Reaser, was head of an internationally known textile company and was present-

ly on his way to join his wife in the south of France for a short vacation.

"And what's your line, Mr. Schliff?" he asked with only mild curiosity.

"Stocks," Sidney answered promptly.

Mr. Reaser's interest picked up. "Stocks. Ah, yes." He looked at Sidney fully. "You've done pretty well, I presume?"

Sidney shrugged indifferently.

"I guess you could say that." They made some small talk about business in general and the state of the stock market. Then Mr. Reaser cleared his throat.

"By the way, Mr. Schliff, I happen to have a few thousand dollars lying idle at the moment. I wonder if you could suggest a good buy in the market?"

"As a matter of fact," said Sidney, smiling, "I can. Ten years ago I took a flier by buying up a quarter of a million dollars worth of stock in Brown Electronics. They were young then, but growing. I investigated them thoroughly before making the purchase. I could see no reason why my investment wasn't a good one. Well, sir, the gamble paid off. Apparently my money gave the company the shot in the arm it needed. Recently I had to sell part of my holdings to pay a rather large debt to my bank." Sidney's smile broadened. "My original investment had increased to more than two million dollars."

# BRIBE MONEY

*He was a little boy, facing a man's deadly problem. For he'd seen a gangdom chief—giving bush money to his dad!*

by

**FRANK B. LONG**

INSPECTOR PETER MCGOWAN looked up quickly from his desk when Lieutenant Detective Dillard walked into his office and shut the door firmly behind him.



"He made a complete statement, sir—with two gold shields present," Dillard said. "You said you preferred not to be there when we went through the usual routine. About the only thing we didn't do was take his fingerprints. That can wait. It all seemed so unnecessary—"

"It had to be that way," Inspector McGowan said. "I'm sure you can understand why."

"I think I can, sir. But at the same time—"

"It was homicide, justifiable or not," McGowan said. "Under the circumstances—very personal ones in this case, Lieutenant—I had to insist on the strictest adherence to routine."

"I can't see how he had the strength to kill a man weighing a hundred and ninety pounds with an andiron," Dillard said, "Gierson's skull was practically crushed. But his story stands up. If he'd changed it in any way—"

Inspector McGowan cut him short with an impatient wave of his hand. He was a handsome man in the prime of life, with keen gray eyes and only slightly graying hair. But now there was a weariness in his every look and gesture, as if most of his customary energy had drained away overnight.

"Where is he now?" he asked.

"He's just outside, sir. He wanted me to talk to you first."

"Why?" Inspector McGowan asked.

Dillard shook his head. He was half McGowan's age, but he seemed suddenly almost paternal in his solicitude. "I'm afraid he's taking it pretty hard, sir. He feels guilty, somehow, as if he'd committed a crime he's convinced he'll have to atone for."

He paused an instant, then blurted out: "If you want my honest opinion, sir, he should have a medal pinned on him. He hates to face you, but I can't understand why—"

Before Dillard could go on the door opened again, and a small boy walked into the room. Although Jimmy McGowan had just passed his thirteenth birthday, he did not look a day over eleven. It was hard to imagine, as Dillard had pointed out, how so frail a youngster could have killed a robustly built man by bringing an andiron into bone-fracturing contact with his skull.

But Tony Gierson was in the morgue now, and there was still a confirmatory stain on the rug in Inspector McGowan's living room where the homicide had taken place.

"Sit down, son," Inspector McGowan said. "I'm mighty proud of you. I want you to know that. We'll be going home in half an hour or so. But first there are one or two questions I'd like to ask you and we can talk here just as well as at home."

He nodded at Dillard. "You can

go now, Lieutenant," he said. "I'm more grateful than I can say."

Dillard gave Jimmy's shoulder a reassuring squeeze, swung about and strode to the door.

As soon as it had closed behind him Jimmy McGowan seated himself in the chair directly in front of his father's desk; and drew up his legs straddle-fashion, as if aware that otherwise they would not have quite reached the floor.

"What is it you want to ask me about, Dad?" he said. "I killed him because I had to. If I hadn't he'd have kidnaped me and to get me back you'd have been forced to drop all of the charges against him. I couldn't see you doing that, Dad. He's a vicious racketeer, and if your hands were tied there'd be no way the new administration could rid the city of him."

Inspector McGowan tightened his lips and stared at his son incredulously for a moment, as if the lad's adult way of coming straight to the point had taken him by surprise.

But before he could say a word in reply the phone at his elbow started ringing.

He uncradled the receiver and raised it to his ear.

Jimmy McGowan stirred restlessly as his father listened to what the voice at the other end of the line was saying. The inspector listened for a full minute in complete silence.

But his face registered at first

startlement, then momentary uncertainty and finally, unmistakable relief.

"I might have known," he said at last. "If we got more breaks like that the papers wouldn't be riding us so hard. I hardly dared hope—All right, Cross. I'll check with you again later. My son's here now, and I'm about to have a talk with him."

The eyes that he trained on his son when he hung up were curiously noncommittal.

"Jimmy," he said, after a pause. "I want you to tell me again exactly what happened. Take your time. You're not talking to Captain Henderson now, or Lieutenant Dillard. No stenographer is taking down your—well, I suppose we might as well call it a confession. That's over and done with. Just go ahead now and tell me in your own words."

"There isn't much to tell, Dad," Jimmy said, wetting his lips and slightly averting his eyes. "Nothing that you don't already know. Gierson just rang the bell and when I opened the door he walked in and said that I would have to come with him. He said there was a car outside, with two other men in it. But he was hoping he wouldn't have to go to the window, and signal them to come upstairs and—rough me up. He said: 'Don't make any trouble for me. If you do, your father may not get you back alive.' "

"What happened then, son?" Inspector McGowan asked.

Jimmy appeared to be having difficulty in meeting his father's gaze. But McGowan had seemingly no intention of calling his son's attention to the fact, for the look that had come into his eyes was not lacking in warmth.

"He turned away for a moment, toward the door, as if he wanted to make sure he hadn't forgotten to close it. Or maybe he thought he heard a noise outside in the hallway, or something. I made a dash for the fireplace, picked up the andiron and hit him as hard as I could on the back of the head. I hit him three times. He—he just dropped to the floor and rolled over on his face. It was pretty awful, Dad. The blood—"

"I know, son," Inspector McGowan said. "But kidnaping is a capital crime and to defend yourself as you say you did took great courage and presence of mind. The awfulness of it you couldn't help."

The inspector arose from his desk and walked to a shadowed corner of the office. When he returned to the desk he was holding the andiron in his hand.

Jimmy's eyes widened when he saw it, and he forgot to sit straddle-fashion in the chair. His legs dangled a half-inch from the floor, but he seemed no longer to care.

His eyes were riveted in dismay on his father's face.

"Jimmy," McGowan said. "I

want you to show me exactly how you did it. I'll be Gierson, understand? I'll just look toward the door, and while my head is turned you raise the andiron and hit me where you hit him."

A faint smile flickered for an instant across Inspector McGowan's lips, but there was no real humor in it.

"Not as hard, of course," he said. "Just a slight tap on the back of my head."

"Dad, I couldn't—" Jimmy started to protest. "It would be—"

"As a favor to me, son? There's just one small thing I'm not absolutely clear about. You want to be a policeman, don't you, ten years from now? The best way to start is to be the kind of policeman's son an inspector who earned his badge the hard way can be proud of."

"Well, all right, Dad," Jimmy said, descending from the chair, and taking the andiron from his father's hand.

Inspector McGowan turned without a word, walked a few paces toward the door and came to an abrupt halt, keeping his head turned.

"All right, son," he said. "I'm waiting."

After a moment Inspector McGowan felt something cold touch the back of his head.

Instantly he swung about.

Jimmy cried out in alarm and the andiron went clattering to the floor.

McGowan stood staring at his son for an instant in complete silence, sadly shaking his head.

"I gave you plenty of time," he said. "And you were certainly in no danger. But you dropped the andiron the instant I turned. Why?"

"I—I don't know, Dad."

"I think I do," inspector McGowan said. "You felt guilty about lying to me. Your story held up when you told it to a half-dozen police officers who are trained to spot lies. But you couldn't keep up the pretense with me, your own father, and that was the only really critical test."

"Look at it this way, son. The chances are strong he'd have turned after the first blow, since he was built like an ox. And if he had turned, you never could have hit him twice more. I don't think you hit him at all. In fact, I'm sure of it. It would have taken a special kind of hardness, no matter how desperate the situation. You either can or you can't, son, and either way it's no disgrace."

Jimmy went back to the chair and sat down, letting his legs dangle again. This time he made no attempt to evade his father's gaze, but there was a look of anguish in his eyes.

"You're right, Dad," he said. "He didn't come to the apartment to kidnap me. Even if he had I never could have struck him with that andiron. I might have grabbed



it up, but I couldn't have used it to bash in his head."

"All right, son," Inspector McGowan said. "Now let's have the truth."

Jimmy hesitated for the barest instant, his lips tightening at the corners in a way that seemed incongruously adult. "I—I saw you counting the money, Dad." He spoke the words quickly and looked away, one hand going up to brush back his hair.

"You saw me—"

"Last night, when you thought I was in bed. I went to the kitchen to get a glass of milk, and when I saw the light was still on in the living room I—well, you don't like me to get anything out of the icebox when it's so late, and I was afraid you'd hear me, and I thought that if I said good night again you wouldn't mind so much. But when I saw how worried you looked I didn't think it was such a good idea. I stayed out in the hall for about a minute, though, and I saw

you get up and put the money in the wall safe."

Inspector McGowan's lips had set in tight lines, and for an instant there was a silence between father and son. McGowan stared out through the wide office window. "So you think it was bribe money. Is that it, son?"

The anguished look had returned to Jimmy's eyes, as if he was wondering if his father knew just how much it was costing him to go on.

"I guess you didn't expect Gierson to call this morning, did you, Dad? If you had, I'm pretty sure you wouldn't have gone downtown so early."

"Go on, Jimmy," Inspector McGowan said.

"When the bell rang and I opened the door he came into the living room and said he had to see you right away. I told him that you were downtown, that you'd left an hour earlier than you usually do. I told him I didn't know why. I should have known better than to let him in. But when I asked who it was and he identified himself through the speaking tube I guess I must have been remembering the money, or something."

"That's when you should have told him I wasn't there," Inspector McGowan said. "I've cautioned you often enough about letting anyone into the apartment when you're alone. You knew who Gierson was, and what he might be capable of."

McGowan's voice was strained. "That money must really have bugged you."

"I don't think it did, Dad. I didn't really think you'd actually take a bribe. It was just something I—I couldn't quite put out of my mind. So when Gierson—"

"Don't try to spare my feeling by soft-pedaling it, son," McGowan said. "It bugged you, all right. So you finally let him in. What did he say when you told him I wasn't there?"

"He was angry, Dad. Sort of threatening. I think he was frightened as well, or he never would have said what he did. It was as if I'd just sort of—well, faded out for a minute and he forgot that you weren't there, and that I was listening with both ears. He said that everything had gone wrong, that he was in trouble, and you would be, too. He said it might be too late to stop what he was afraid would happen."

"Talking to himself, you mean, ranting and raving and putting most of the blame on me. Is that what you're trying to say, son?"

Jimmy nodded. "That's the way it was, I guess. But only for about a minute. He calmed down a little when he saw me looking at him as if I didn't know what it was all about. I knew how important it was to give him that idea. He grabbed me by the shoulder and said: 'All right, I'll phone your father from here. Get lost. Go for a

walk and come back in twenty minutes."

"I didn't want to leave him alone in the apartment. But what could I do? He'd have made me go, no matter what I said. So I went."

"He must have spent a few minutes thinking over what he was going to say to me on the phone," Inspector McGowan said. "No call came through. What did you do when you left the apartment?"

"I just drifted around the neighborhood for fifteen or twenty minutes," Jimmy said. "I didn't have a dime to phone you with. Anyway, talking about him didn't seem such a good idea, with Sergeant Bergor or someone else listening in."

"You'd just about decided to stop giving me the benefit of the doubt. Was that it? The money, on top of what you'd heard Gierson say—"

"I'm sorry, Dad."

"What did you do when the twenty minutes were up?" McGowan asked, staring past his son at the harbor view far below.

"I went back to the apartment."

"And when you got there?"

"He was lying by the fireplace with— It was awful, Dad, like I said. There was blood on the andiron and blood on the rug. I could have picked the andiron up and left my fingerprints on it, but I didn't touch it. I was going to say I'd killed him, and you've told me that if you want to be believed

tampering with the evidence is the worst thing you can do. You pile up complications for yourself.

"So I just kept going over in my mind what I was going to say when I had to make a statement, as I knew I'd be asked to do. I knew I'd have to be careful and not talk too much. They didn't scare me, Dad. I don't know why exactly. With you it was different—"

"Was the door ajar when you left the apartment?" Jimmy's father asked. "I mean, did you forget to slam it after you?"

"I may have, Dad. After Gierson told me to get out I was too worried to think about it. I just remember getting into the elevator and going down to the street."

"So anyone trailing him could have walked in without ringing, and picked up the andiron. A minute or two after you went down in the elevator."

"I guess it could have happened that way," Jimmy said.

Inspector McGowan looked at his son steadily for a moment. "When you finally did phone me I got there in about twenty minutes, with the siren wide open, and you told me you'd struck him three times with the andiron and killed him dead. Why did you make up that kidnaping story? The truth now. *Whom were you trying to protect?*"

"You, Dad," Jimmy said. "I thought you knew."

"I know now, yes. But I didn't



when you walked into this room a few minutes ago."

Inspector McGowan did not remove his eyes from his son's stricken face. "I was right here all morning. How could I have had anything to do with—"

"There are lots of ways, Dad," Jimmy said. "You're an inspector of police. You could have—"

"All right, son, say it. What I said about the truth still goes."

"You could have arranged to have it done. If the whole police department is shot through with corruption—"

A look of sadness came into Inspector McGowan's eyes. "Listen to me, son," he said. "Listen carefully, and ten years from now maybe—just maybe—you'll still want to be a policeman, despite what you've just said.

"Gierson wasn't bribing me to drop the investigation, and it wasn't payoff money you saw me counting. But sometimes a police department that *isn't* corrupt—and the D.A. as well—has to make what is known as a deal. There's no other way of securing convictions. We'd gathered enough evidence to send Tony Gierson to the chair. But he'd agreed to testify in court against the entire organization, including two Mr. Bigs, one who dwarfed him and one who was just about on his level.

"As for the money, it was their last big take. He turned it over to me last night. I immediately noti-

fied the D.A. It's downstairs now in the vault, to be returned to the rightful owners, when certain legal technicalities have been cleared away. The D.A. felt that if I got downtown with it early this morning it would be all right to keep it in the wall safe overnight. Not really overnight, just from two to seven. That's why I left the apartment so early this morning."

Inspector McGowan paused an instant, then went on slowly: "The phone call I got a moment ago clears everything up. They've got the man who killed Gierson through some fast, extremely clever lab work. His prints on the andiron, for one thing, which you wisely didn't touch. Just one, actually—a bad one—but they brought it out.

"He's Marty Cauvin, a hired killer. He probably would have silenced Gierson in the usual way, with a bullet, if seeing that andiron hadn't given him a better idea. Killing him that way, in my apartment, would have made it look bad for me, if all the details of the deal hadn't been on the record. They are, of course, but he had no way of being sure of that and it probably seemed a gamble worth taking.

"As for Gierson, he thought that he'd completely covered himself, that the organization had no idea that he was going to sing in the courtroom. But he must have suddenly discovered otherwise, and that's what he meant when he said that everything had gone wrong. Apparently he came to the apartment to warn me and to accuse me of not giving him protection."

For the third time since he had walked into the office Jimmy found himself unable to meet his father's gaze.

Inspector McGowan stood up, walked around the desk and put his arm around the shoulders of the small, seated figure.

"It's all right, Jimmy," he said. "You thought your old man was in serious trouble and you went to bat for him, all the way. I can't be angry with you for that."

Jimmy looked up and gulped. "You really mean it, Dad? You're not just saying that, to keep me from feeling bad?"

"Of course I mean it son," Inspector McGowan said. "Suppose we go home now and see what's on TV. We both need a little relaxation, after what we've been through."

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## FAREWELL MESSAGE

by JEFF PETERS

*I read the note, and suddenly  
I knew. I was a dead man. But  
—dead men sometimes tell.*

122

THE RAT GNAWS in the wainscoting. He is one of many. I should like to poison them, yet I dare not go to the chemist and say, "I am troubled by rats. I want some poison to get rid of them." You see, it could be used. I don't know how exactly but it could be—of that I am sure.

I am hungry, but it is scarcely worth the effort of eating. First I should have to wash my hands with the soap I carry always with me and then unlock the steel trunk

in which I keep my food. I chew my pen handle and then I throw it down from me.

Perhaps it is? One simply doesn't know. It lurks everywhere. Last week I told the milkman not to call. I use condensed milk now and I buy my food at a different shop every day and sometimes in the next village.

I get a new pen from the drawer. Think, man, where did you buy it! In London? Yes, I'm sure now. It's probably all right then. I should have bought a typewriter for correspondence, but it is too late now.

Sometimes I try to paint. Another ten days or so and my masterpiece would be finished. But I cannot settle to it any longer. Perhaps it will never be finished now. Yet I dare to hope it will be.

It started one evening just over a year ago.

"Have another whisky?" asked my next-door neighbor, Richard Parker, screwing up his little eyes, and getting ready to pour.

"No, thanks," I said, a little gruffly. I did not like Parker and I did not want any more of his whisky. I did not know why I had accepted his invitation.

"Go on, have another," he said, fingering the crystal decanter. "You must have another."

"Oh, all right," I said, rather ungraciously.

"How's the big painting?" he asked. I thought I detected something patronizing in his question.

"I've had to drop it," I said. "The wolf is up the path—if not on the doorstep."

"Bad luck," he said. But he did not mean it. He slumped his overfed figure in the arm chair. It pleased me to see he was going bald very quickly. "Still all trials are good for the artist, no doubt. From them often comes his best work."

It was the usual unthinking, unfeeling business man's cant and because I had heard it a thousand times now, I should have let it go. Instead, I snapped back.

"You subscribe to the idea of pinching the belly of genius, do you?"

"My dear fellow," he drawled lazily, moving the plump diamond ring round his finger, "I don't subscribe to anything. I have no theories about art, though I like it well enough. From time to time I buy a picture, when I see something I like."

"Is it good for your prestige, then, to be considered a patron of the arts?" I asked.

Parker spun his whisky round in his glass. His fleshy face showed a tinge of color. His lids closed down over his small pale blue eyes as he made an effort to keep his temper. He spoke slowly after a pause of perhaps another half minute. "I say, old chap, are you trying to pick a quarrel with me? I quite like you, you know."

"When one is rich it is easy to



quite like people," I said hotly, splitting an infinitive.

He got up out of the chair and walked across the Persian carpet which would have fed me for a year, fingered the ring which would have kept me for five, nodded in fat well-fed synthetic sympathy.

I had known Parker for six months, ever since in fact he had bought the large house next to my Wiltshire cottage and we had got into casual conversation over the garden wall.

I had disliked him from the first. It wasn't merely because he had money. Lots of people have money. It was because he had something more precious—leisure, unlimited leisure, and did nothing with it.

So I lost my temper with him and cried, "I have genius and cannot use it. You have nothing. You're a parasitic clod and do nothing but loaf about on your late wife's money."

"Leave her out of this!" he cried.

I felt a hot flush of pleasure. Now I'd stung him. Then I heard my voice saying something I had no thought of saying.

Like all artists I am intuitive and now I heard myself saying: "It is just as well for you that coroners in little sleepy villages like ours aren't inquisitive! Perhaps, that's why you came down here to live before she—she died. I wonder if that was your wife's handwriting in the suicide note?"

Parker's face was pale. He put out a hand on the mantel to steady himself. His eyes looked wildly at me.

"You—you—"

"Yes, I guessed," I said. "I knew."

But I hadn't. It was a brilliant shot in the dark.

It began then. I hadn't thought of it before he was offering me money to buy my silence. He was quicker brained than I was.

"Thirty pounds a month," he said.

"All right," I said. I was still a bit dazed.

He smiled and then set his mouth. I realised he would have gone more but I was not greedy about money. With me it was but a means to an end.

"You will let me have a painting for each cheque and just to be business-like, give me a receipt." He went over to the whisky and poured a drink for each of us.

"To our partnership," he said.

"And before you go I must pay you for your first picture."

He was himself now and, no doubt, telling himself he had made a good bargain.

"Now write me out a receipt," he said later, holding the check out and blowing on it. "You can leave the painting with Rodgers."

Rodgers was his driver-valet.

For three months he paid me my money. I had no scruples about it. The world, I'd learned, was dog eat dog. I happened to be a genius and Parker wasn't. I knew no laws as ordinary men know them. Oh, I'd give the world good value. I worked hard and slept easily.

With leisure my art grew and developed. I could sense a new maturity in it, a surety, a heady delight in my released powers.

Then suddenly I started to worry about Parker. I called on him.

"Materials have gone up and also I must have a few more creature comforts," I said. "You must pay me five hundred a month."

"Your paintings are going up in value," he said, smiling.

He paid, of course. I lived as soberly as before. The extra two hundred a month I used to pay a private detective to watch Parker. Put it down to my intuition, but I was suddenly suspicious of what he might be planning. The detective discovered nothing.

After seven weeks he demanded more money and I agreed. It was not my money, so why should

I lose his services? Parker agreed readily to pay more. The detective deceived me for four months before I realised that he was working for Parker:

"Two can play at this game," I told myself and kept the detective on—and employed another.

Parker bought him too.

My relations with Parker remained cordial but distant. He posted me a check each month; I wrote him a receipt; and delivered a painting to Rodgers. I thought once or twice of cutting out this hypocrisy, but I had a stack of old canvases, worthless things that I despised. I know now why Parker wanted the receipts.

I met Parker occasionally. We spoke no more than "Good day" to each other.

Three months ago I started my masterpiece. It is a large allegorical painting to show the dichotomy in human nature, in Life itself. In the gross flesh of my sensual beings lurked the soul, in the sensitive eyes and the mysterious corners of the mouth.

But I put it badly. My vision was compelling and from deep inside me. For weeks I worked as in a dream, scarcely stopping except to snatch some food and a few begrimed hours of sleep. My dream began to take shape, to be frozen on the canvas. With my goal in sight at the end of last week, I eased up a little to gain strength for the last surge.

I had taken no notice of Parker or anything else for that matter. But now I observed that he went away for the weekend. During Saturday afternoon I found myself staring at the windows of his house and I knew suddenly what I had to do. I had to break in. I watched until I saw the housekeeper go off to the local at seven o'clock and an hour later when it was dark I burgled my way in. It was simple enough. I found a window unlocked, almost as though it had been left for me. I think now it had.

I had a small hand torch and I muffled its light in my handkerchief. I went to his study first. I found them in the first drawer of the desk I pulled back. It was the top right-hand one and unlocked, almost as though I was intended to find what was there. In a manilla folder were some sheets of paper covered with a hand-writing that seemed familiar. It wasn't Parker's. I read the top one:

*I cannot go on any longer.*

*My nerves have gone in the struggle. I had genius but because I was born a poor man it has been stillborn. Because one must eat, so much of my energies have been dissipated on hack work. Yet I know I could have reached the heights. I have had a generous patron but he cannot help me any longer . . .*

I felt the back of my neck going cold and the hair stiffening. It was my writing! Or, rather, Par-

ker's imitation of it and a diabolically good one, too. And there was my "signature"—my bank would have paid on it.

On impulse I took one of the notes—all were phrased much the same, and in some my "handwriting" was better, if possible—and stole back to my cottage. I had no conscious reason in taking the forged note and its theft has undoubtedly made my death even more inevitable. Parker will not spare me now.

On the Monday another check was due from Parker. Instead I received an unctuous note regretting that he could no longer buy my paintings. I knew then that the blow would come swiftly. But from whence?

That was yesterday. I thought of going to the police, in my first moments of panic. Then I realised that in the eyes of the law a black-mailer is little better than a murderer, whatever his motives. If I went to the police I should never finish my great picture. I should spend years of cruel frustration in jail that would erode my talent.

Since I made the decision I have worked frenziedly on my masterpiece. In it lies my immortality. A few hours and it will be finished.

The rat scampers in the ceiling. Today I posted a letter to my solicitor, to be opened after my death. It contains an account of all this and the forged note I stole from Parker. It is enough to hang him.

# DISORDERLY



by  
**BARRY N. MALZBERG**

In life she had been untidy. But the way she died seemed too neat to be real.

HENRY WILSON came home at six to find his wife Flora lying quite dead on the sofa, an open bottle of barbiturates clenched in her left hand, a suicide note draped across her chest.

Carefully putting down his briefcase and washing his hands from knuckle to elbow, Henry straightened out the house, closed the window shades and then picked up the note and read it.

*Dear Henry: I am sorry to do this but it is the only way for both of us. You have made your life intolerable and now you have done the same to me. I can no longer live in a house like a glass cage and I cannot leave because—and this is the truth—there is no other way of life for me. So I leave you and I hope that things will be better for you and for me. I hope too that you learn something. Your wife, Flora.*

The note was typed and she had not signed it.

Henry looked at it and his wife's body for a very long time; then he straightened out the house a bit, getting the furniture back in place and raising Flora's corpse so that he could take some of the minute dust off the couch. He flicked the shades a few times, put the desk in order—Flora had left the typewriter uncovered—and then, when he was sure that everything was in place, he picked up the phone and called the police.

"My wife has killed herself," he said. "I came home to find her on the couch. It was an overdose of sleeping pills. No, she's dead; I checked her breathing. I live at sixteen West Street on the ground floor. My apartment has a white door. I just painted it last week."

"Hold on," said a competent voice, "and we'll be right out."

"She's dead," Henry repeated and hung up.

In the few minutes before the police came there were still things which Henry saw he had to do, now that he had a chance to look the apartment over carefully. He closed the cabinet of the television set. He took a broom and flicked some grains of bread off the kitchen floor. He checked the bedroom to make sure that the bed he had made that morning was not rumpled. He changed the pillow case—there were a few tear drops on it and they had stained. He made up the garbage and disposed of it.

When he was certain that he had done everything to the best of his ability, Henry sat by the body of his dead wife and waited for the police. He waited for what seemed a long time, but, eventually they came. He heard the siren outside. He got up and opened the door for them.

Two policemen came up the walk, a short one and a tall one.

"My name is Rogers," the short one said, "and this is O'Toole. You called the station house a few minutes ago?"

"That's right," Henry said. "My name is Henry Wilson and my wife has killed herself."

"Killed herself, huh?" O'Toole said. "Well, let's just check this out."

"Before you go in," Henry said, "would you do me a favor and wipe your shoes off on the rug outside? We have a new carpet and—"

O'Toole gave Henry a strange look.

"Your wife killed herself?" he said.

"Yes. If you'd just do me the favor—"

Rogers and O'Toole shrugged, looking at Henry carefully, and obediently scuffed their shoes in the hall, then followed Henry inside.

"That her?" Rogers said, pointing to the couch.

"That's her. I came home and found her dead."

The two policemen went to the couch, leaned over.

"She's dead all right," O'Toole said. "When did you discover this?"

"When I came home from work about half an hour ago. I work in a bank. I'm a teller."

"Looks like suicide, all right," Rogers said, picking up the empty bottle which Henry had centered on the coffee table. "She must of took forty'of these things."

"It was a terrible shock," Henry said.

"Let's check out the place," said O'Toole. "Mind if we look around in here?"

"Not at all. You'll find that our home—*my* home—is quite neat."

The two officers disappeared into the bedroom and began to move things around; Henry shuddered as he heard the room being disarranged. Then one of them went into the bathroom and began to flush the toilet repeatedly. Henry twitched.

O'Toole came back in by him-

self. "You had any indications that your wife might commit suicide?"

"No," said Henry, taking a chair and putting it neatly against one of the walls, sitting down on it. "None at all."

"Any trouble between you too?"

"None at all," said Henry. "Oh, we had our disagreements. She wasn't a very good housekeeper and I've always felt strongly about those things. But we've been married for two years and I thought we were very happy."

"Then why did she kill herself?"

Henry rubbed an infinitesimal scratch on his left shoetip. "I haven't the faintest idea, officer."

"Well," Rogers said, coming back into the room and taking off his hat. "I guess we better call down the precinct and get them over here. It looks like suicide. I'm sorry, Mr.—uh."

"Wilson," Henry said.

"Just wait a minute," said O'Toole, taking another chair from under the table and sitting down in it so heavily that it groaned and made Henry jump. "I just want to ask Mr. Wilson one or two questions. You said you came home to find her dead on the couch. Any suicide note?"

"Suicide note? Well, yes."

"What did it say?"

"Well, it didn't make much sense. Something about being unhappy, I think; about being sorry to leave me. She typed it and she made a lot of errors."

"I see," said O'Toole. "Where is it?"

"What?"

"The note. Where is it? It's evidence, you know. Where did you put it?"

"Put it?" said Henry. "Well, I don't know. I mean I'm not sure where it is now."

O'Toole gave Rogers a long, meaningful look and Rogers swung his head, peered at Henry. "You don't know?" Rogers said. "You don't know where your wife's suicide note is? Maybe you don't know because there wasn't a suicide note? Is that it?"

"Oh yes, there was. I read it. It was just that I—well, I incinerated it. I cleaned up the apartment a little and I put it in a bag and took everything downstairs to the incinerator."

"Well, now, is that so?" said O'Toole.

"I had to get rid of it, you see. I can't stand sloppiness. That was Flora's problem. She didn't know how to keep house and I had to do everything myself. I can't stand things lying around."

"So, you incinerated your wife's suicide note," said Rogers, "and then you cleaned up the place a little. So in other words, it's just your word that she left a note. It's just your word that she killed herself, right? You could have poisoned her and left her with that empty bottle on the couch and for all we know it would be suicide,

right? It could be that way, huh, my friend?"

"But it didn't happen that way," Henry said, "and I wish you wouldn't raise your voice. I told you, I can't stand disorder. I cleaned up everything."

"I'm going to call the precinct," O'Toole said heavily. "You're in custody Mr.—uh."

"Wilson," Rogers said.

"Wilson," said O'Toole.

"But I told you," Henry said, straining in his chair. "I told—"

But it was never revealed exactly what Henry had told them for at the first clinging, cold touch of the handcuffs on his wrist, the dirty brass touching his own skin, Henry gasped and sprawled over his rug in a perfect faint, knocking over his chair and disarranging his room. It was fortunate that he was not conscious to see the disarray because it would have upset him even more.

The autopsy showed that it was barbiturates, of course. But that did Henry very little good at all. The shocking disorder of the cell in which he had been confined for two weeks completely undermined his sanity and although the judge was very sympathetic, there was nothing to do but to remand him to a mental institution for an indeterminate time. Henry is still there and although the outlook is uncertain he has brought a better appearance to the day rooms.

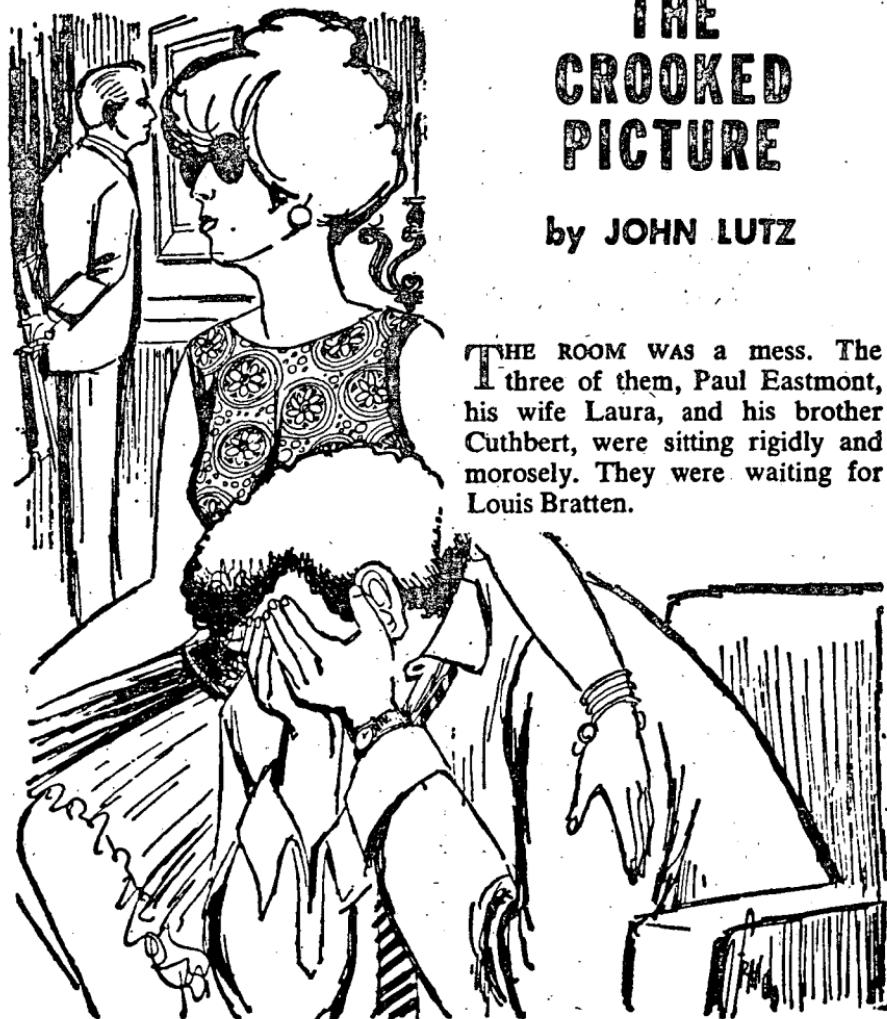
Flora might have been pleased.

Where do you go . . . what can you do, when  
you're preyed on by a man who is dead?

## THE CROOKED PICTURE

by JOHN LUTZ

THE ROOM WAS a mess. The three of them, Paul Eastmont, his wife Laura, and his brother Cuthbert, were sitting rigidly and morosely. They were waiting for Louis Bratten.



"But just who is this Bratten?" Laura Eastmont asked in a shaking voice. She was a very beautiful woman, on the edge of middle age.

"He's a repulsive, insulting ne'er-do-well," Cuthbert, recently of Harvard, said. "A drunken, insolent sot."

"And he's a genius," Paul Eastmont added, "in his own peculiar way. More importantly, he's my friend." He placed a hand on his wife's wrist. "Bratten is the most discreet man I know."

Laura shivered. "I hope so, Paul."

Cuthbert rolled his king size cigarette between thumb and forefinger, an annoyed look on his young, aquiline face. "I don't see why you put such stock in the man, Paul. He's run the gamut of alcoholic degeneration. From chief of homicide to—what? If I remember correctly, you told me some time ago that they'd taken away his private investigator's license."

He saw that he was upsetting his sister-in-law even more and shrugged his thin shoulders. "My point is that he's hardly the sort of man to be confided in concerning *this*." He looked thoughtful. "On the other hand, half of what he says is known to be untrue anyway."

The butler knocked lightly, pushed one of the den's double doors open, and Louie Bratten entered. He was a blocky, paunchy little man of about forty, with a

perpetual squint in one eye. His coarse dark hair was mussed, his suit was rumpled and his unclasped tie hung crookedly outside one lapel. He looked as if he'd just stepped out of a hurricane.

"Bratten!" Paul Eastmont said in warm greeting. "You don't know how glad I am to have you in on this!"

Cuthbert nodded coldly. "Mr. Bratten."

Laura stared intently at her hands, which were folded in her lap.

"Give me a drink," Bratten said.

Paul crossed to the portable bar and poured him a straight Scotch, no ice.

Bratten sipped the Scotch, smacked his lips in satisfaction, and then slouched in the most comfortable leather armchair in the den.

"Now, what's bugging you, Paul?" he asked.

Cuthbert stood and leaned on the mantle. "It's hardly a matter to be taken lightly," he said coldly.

"How in the hell can I take it lightly," Bratten asked, "when I don't even know what the matter is?"

Paul raised a hand for silence. "Let me explain briefly. Several years ago, before Laura and I had met, a picture was taken of her in a very—uncompromising pose. This photo fell into the hands of a blackmailer named Hays, who has been milking us for two hundred dollars a month for the past four

years. Recently Hays needed some cash badly. He offered to give me the photo for five thousand dollars."

Paul Eastmont glanced protectively at his embarrassed wife. "Naturally I agreed, and the deal was made. The negative, incidentally, was destroyed long ago, and I happen to know that the photo wasn't reproduced at any time since by taking a picture of it. That was part of the original blackmail arrangement. It's the only picture in existence, an eight by ten glossy."

"Interesting," Bratten said.

"But Hays turned out to be a stubborn sort," Paul went on. "He gave me the photograph yesterday, and like a fool I didn't destroy it. He saw me put it in my wall safe. Last night he broke in here and tried to steal it back."

"And did he?"

"We don't know. Clark, the butler, sleeps in that part of the house, and he heard Hays tinkering about. He surprised him at the open safe and chased him into this room. Hays locked the door behind him as he ran in here, and then found it was a long drop out the window onto hard cement."

"Terrific Scotch," Bratten said. "Did he have the photo?"

"Yes. It wasn't in the wall safe. As you can see, he hurriedly rummaged about in this room, lifting cushions, knocking over the lamp, we think looking for a place to hide



the photo. Then he leaped out the window."

"Caught?"

"Hurt himself when he landed and couldn't run fast enough. Shot dead by the police just outside the gate. And he didn't have the photo on his body, nor was it on the grounds."

"Hays was a smart blackmailer," Bratten said. He squinted at Paul. "You left the room as it was?"

Paul nodded. "I know your peculiar way of working. But the photo must be in this room. We looked everywhere, but we didn't disturb anything, put everything back exactly the way we found it."

"Ah, that's good," Bratten said, either of the Scotch or of the Eastmont's actions. "Another drink, if you please." He handed the empty glass up to Cuthbert, who was the only one standing.

"Really," Cuthbert said, grabbing the glass. "If I had my way we wouldn't have confided this to you."

"We never did hit it off, did we?" Bratten laughed. "That's probably

because you have too much education. Ruins a man sometimes. Restricts his thinking."

Cuthbert reluctantly gave Bratten his fresh drink. "You should be an expert on ruination."

"Touch. That means touche in English." Bratten leaned back and ran his tongue over his lips. "This puts me in mind of another case. One about ten years ago. There was this locked room type murder—"

"What on earth does a locked room murder have to do with this case?" Cuthbert interrupted in agitation.

"Everything, you over-educated idiot. Everything."

Paul motioned for Cuthbert to be silent, and Bratten continued.

"Like they say," Bratten said, "there's a parallel here." He took a sip of Scotch and nonchalantly hung one leg over an arm of his chair. "There were these four brothers, rich, well bred—like Cuthbert here, only with savvy. They'd made their pile on some cheap real estate development out west. The point is, the business was set up so one of the brothers controlled most of the money, and they didn't get along too well to start off with."

He raised his glass and made a mock bow to Cuthbert. "In language you'd understand, it was a classic sibling rivalry intensified by economic inequality. What it all meant was that if this one brother

was dead, the other three would profit a hell of a lot. And lo and behold, this one brother did somehow get dead. That's when I was called into the case by a friend of mine, a local sheriff in Illinois.

"Seems one of the brothers had bought a big old house up in a remote wooded area, and six months later the four of them met up there for a business conference or something. The three surviving brothers' story was simply that their brother had gone into this room, locked the door, and never came out. Naturally not, lying in the middle of the floor with a knife in his chest."

"I fail to see any parallel whatever so far," Cuthbert said.

"Patience, punk. The thing of it was, this room was locked from the inside with a sliding bolt and a key still in the keyhole. The one window that opened was locked and there wasn't a mark on the sill. It was summer, and the ground was hard, but I don't think we would have found anything outside anyway."

"Secret panel, no doubt," Cuthbert said.

"Nope. It did happen to be a paneled room, though. We went over that room from wall to wall, ceiling to floor. There was no way out but the door or the window. And to make the thing really confusing, the knife was wiped clean of prints, and there was nothing nearby the dying man could have

used to do that; even if he'd been crazy enough to want to for some reason. There was no sign of a struggle, or of any blood other than what had soaked into the rug around the body.

"Without question the corpse was lying where it fell. On the seat of a chair was an open book, and on an end table was a half empty cup of coffee with the dead man's prints on it. But there was one other thing in the room that caught my attention."

"Well, get it over with and get to the business at hand," Cuthbert said, trying to conceal his interest. "Who was it and how was it done?"

"Another drink," Bratten said, handing up his glass. "Now here was the situation: Dead man in a locked room, three suspects with good motives who were in the same house at the time of the murder, and a knife without prints. The coroner's inquest could come to no conclusion but suicide unless the way the murderer left the room was explained. Without that explanation, no jury could convict."

Bratten paused to take a long pull of Scotch. "The authorities thought they were licked, and my sheriff friend and I were walking around the outside of the house, talking about how hopeless things were, when I found it."

"The solution?" Cuthbert asked.

"No. A nail. And a shiny one."

"Good Lord," Cuthbert said.

"You ignoramus," Bratten

sneered. "Doesn't that suggest something to you?"

"It suggests somebody dropped a nail," Cuthbert said furiously.

"Well, I tied that in with what had caught my attention inside the room," Bratten said, "and like they say, everything fell into place. We contacted the former owners of the house, who were in Europe, snooped around a bit, and that was that. We got a confession right away."

Cuthbert was incredulous. "Because of a nail?"

"Not entirely," Bratten said. "How about another drink, while you're up?"

"You'll drown!" Cuthbert cried. He turned to Paul. "How do you expect this sot to help us if he's dead drunk?"

"Give him another," Paul said, "and let him finish."

His face livid, Cuthbert poured Bratten another glass of Scotch. "Out with it," he said impatiently as he gave Bratten the glass. "What was it you saw in the room that you connected with the nail you found?"

"A picture," Bratten said. "It was hanging real crooked, though everything else in the room was in order. It's things like that that bring first daylight to a case." He looked at Cuthbert as if he were observing some kind of odd animal life. "You still don't get it?"

"No," Cuthbert said, controlling himself. "And as I first suspect-

ed, there is no parallel whatsoever with our problem."

Bratten shrugged. "What the brothers did was this: Through their business, they gathered the materials secretly over a period of time and got things ready. When the time was right, they got their victim to go out there with them and stabbed him on the spot, then wiped the knife handle clean. They had the concrete block foundation, the floor, the roof, and all but one of the walls up. They built in an L of the big house so there were only two walls to bother with. They even had the rug and furniture down and ready.

"After the victim was dead, they quickly put up the last wall, already paneled like the rest on the inside and shingled with matching shingles on the outside, and called the police. In short, the locked room was prefabricated and built around the body."

Cuthbert's mouth was open. "Unbelievable!"

"Not really," Bratten said. "No one would think to check and see how many rooms the house had, and they did a real good job on the one they built. Of course on close examination you could tell. The

heating duct was a dummy, and the half of the molding that fitted against the last wall had dummy nail heads in it.

"But from the outside the room was perfect. The shingles matched and the metal corner flashing was a worn piece taken from another part of the house. The trouble was they didn't think to use old nails, and they didn't want to leave the inside of that last wall bare when they fit it in place."

"An amusing story, I admit," Cuthbert said. "True or not. Now if you'll be so kind as to point out this damned parallel you keep talking about . . ."

Bratten looked surprised. "Why, the picture, you imbecile! The crooked picture on the last wall!" He pointed to a cheap oil painting that hung on the Eastmont's wall.

"But that picture is straight!" Cuthbert yelled in frustration. "It is immaculately straight!"

"Exactly, you learned jackass! It's the only thing in this fouled-up room besides my drink that is immaculately straight. And I suspect if you look between the painting and the cardboard backing, you'll find your photograph."

They did.

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# THE SECRET WEAPON



*Vibrant, desirable, she had everything to live for. Yet before that night of horror ended she must keep her strange tryst—as the bride of a wraith named Death!*

by MAX VAN DERVEER

THE PHONE RANG. Desiree Fleming was instantly suspicious. All of the calls were supposed to be completed. They had heard from Blue and Gray early in the day. Red had checked in about four o'clock. And no more than ten minutes had passed since Yellow had been on the line.

Frowning, Desiree crossed the main room of the hotel suite to sweep the receiver against her flat

stomach. She reached out and cracked the closed bedroom door. Blue-striped, male pajamas, a dark blue robe and slippers were laid out on one of two single beds in the room. She pushed the door wide, looked at the closed bath door.

She had a hunch the bath door was locked securely. From behind it came the sound of rushing shower water and the animalistic grunts of

a man who might be dying—or who had suddenly closed the hot water tap of the shower. Doctor Samuel Herchenfelder, scientist extraordinary, was completing his shower and had not heard the phone ring.

Desiree Fleming put the receiver against her ear. "Yes?"

"I gotta talk to Doctor Herchenfelder." The voice was coarse, impatient and guarded. "It's important, Mrs. Herchenfelder. I gotta—"

"This is Doctor Herchenfelder," said Desiree on inspiration.

The man on the line seemed to gag. He stuttered briefly, then grunted, "Huh?"

"Doctor Samantha Herchenfelder."

There was silence in Desiree's ear.

"Samantha. Sam," she pressed. The coarse voice came back. "You kiddin'?"

"I think, sir, that you are wasting my time."

"No! Hey, don't hang up! Cool it a sec—cool it." Desiree heard an indrawn breath that rattled. "Doc Sam, I gotta see yuh!"

"Who is this, please?"

"Never mind. Yuh wanna live?"

"I prefer to."

"Then I gotta see yuh pronto!"

"Please—"

"Some people are gonna make a hit on you!"

"What!"

"I'm on the other side, Doc. I

been on the other side, but I'm cuttin', yuh know?"

"No, I don't know."

"Doc, I ain't got time to lay it all out for yuh. I got me a bum deal today, I got me a—Never mind. I've been on the Commie coaster and I'm gettin' off. Yuh understand that much?"

"Yes," Desiree said slowly, making it sound as if she was not sure she did understand.

"Okay," said the coarse voice, "so I'm returning a favor to some rats. I'm squealing. Some people are gonna make a hit on yuh. If yuh wanna know when and how you be at eighth and Crowly in thirty minutes. Yuh can make it from there."

"Tell me now!"

"Not on the horn, doll. It's complicated."

The line went dead. Desiree put the phone together slowly. It was quiet in the suite. She became conscious of the silence. She cocked her head. There was no sound of rushing water, no grunts. She stepped into the bedroom. "Sam?"

"Doctor Herchenfelder, Miss Fleming," the deep voice behind the closed bath door clipped. "And please vacate my bedroom. Yours is—"

"I'm going out, Sam."

"Excellent. And while you are out perhaps you will have the decency to take another suite?"

"Now is that any way to talk to a wife?"

"If I wanted a wife, Miss Fleming, I'd have taken one five years ago. Washington is going to hear about this."

"Washington made the reservation, remember?"

"Miss Fleming, please! I'm sure there has been a misunderstanding. Surely your superiors don't expect—"

"My superiors often expect the impossible, Sam."

"*Doctor Herchenfelder!*"

"I'm toddling off, but you stay put. Okay? You won't leave the suite? Promise?"

"Miss Fleming, I am retiring!"

"Do just that."

Desiree left the suite and locked the door. She looked up and down the empty corridor. Uncertainty was high in her. Vibrant, tousled, twenty-three, in blouse, pink Capris, short coat and gun, her new assignment from Washington's most secreted bureau suddenly seemed stuffed with hazards and she was not positive that she was doing the right thing in leaving Doctor Samuel Herchenfelder.

She had been told to protect Doctor Herchenfelder at any cost. The call could have been a ruse to lure her from the suite. It could have been designed to clear a path to the scientist. What would a more experienced agent do?

Desiree rode the elevator down to the vast lobby. She knew three things about the caller. He had a coarse voice, he had information

he was not suppose to have, and he did not know Doctor Sam Herchenfelder was a man.

She got out of the cab at 9th and Crowly to walk the final block. The city shimmered in lake fog and she was now filled with the sensation that she had been duped. Desiree's inclination was to return to the hotel as quickly as possible, but the cab was gone.

She hunched deeper inside the short coat and walked on quick steps. Motorists and pedestrians had bowed to the fog. A single car crawled along the shrouded street and disappeared and she did not meet anyone on foot. The heels of her loafers seemed to click unusually loud against the silence of the night.

She traveled the block quickly, to stand just outside the dull light of an intersection street lamp. She looked around. She attempted to pierce the mist. She seemed alone.

"*Doctor?*"

The high-pitched voice came out of the whitish swirl to her left. Reflexively, she whirled and went down to the concrete fast. A gun boomed against the wet night. Desiree heard the whistle of the slug. She rolled, her right hand digging for the tiny gun in the shoulder holster under the short coat.

The big gun boomed again and this time the slug chewed concrete near her head. She rolled into a wall and cried out. In the fog, she'd rolled in the wrong direction.

She'd meant to roll into the gutter, into a storm sewer with luck, anywhere to gain an ounce of protection. But now she was plastered against a wall and exposed. She thought herself a huge target and she desperately fired a shot wildly from the tiny gun. She expected a return shot, a slug crashing into the top of her skull.

The lone sound was the pounding of fleeing footsteps.

A rattle escaped Desiree. She came off the wall and sat up on the wet sidewalk. The night was abruptly quiet again, but she knew that within seconds the intersection would become cluttered. Someone somewhere had heard the shots, and someone somewhere would call the police.

Desiree Fleming scrambled to her feet and ran. She had passed an alley entrance midway back in the block. She wanted that alley.

A wide-shouldered citizen loomed out of the fog ahead of her and jerked to a stop. "Hey, lady, I heard—"

It was all he got out before Desiree shoved him aside, out of her path. She heard a string of oaths as he spun out toward the street.

The alley was a black cavern when she turned into it. The fog seemed thicker. It pressed in. Desiree stopped, then moved deeper into the blackness cautiously. She had no desire to tumble over a trash barrel; she didn't want noise. A faint glow of light ahead lifted

her. She dog-trotted toward it, found it to be a middle-of-the-block street lamp that ordinarily would have illuminated the intersecting alleys.

The light became her salvation. She caught the glimmer in the corner of her eye and knew it was reflection from metal. An iron ladder dangled invitingly from the tiers of the fire escape on the side of the building.

She leaped up, caught the bottom rung of the ladder and hoisted herself until she had a foothold. She went up fast to the first tier and crouched. There was only the fog. She couldn't see the alley. But she heard the wail of a siren and she went on up the tiers, past the lighted windows to roll over the parapet of the building and onto the roof. She crouched. She couldn't afford police interference. Her eyes searched. Nothing moved. She heard the siren die. Finally she let out a long breath and attempted to relax. There was only one course of action left for her now. Desiree had to get word to her boss Holly in Washington. The Bureau chief would be upset and he would demand that the meeting of the great minds be cancelled.

"Six men," he had said in briefing her and the other five agents. "Three egghead scientists and three of this country's most brilliant military minds. Each of you has been assigned to a man. You'll be incognito, of course, and you

have just one assignment—keep your man alive at any cost."

"What's the pitch?" one of the agents had asked.

"A project known as TX. It's a new weapon. That's all I can tell you. The eggheads, each skilled in a phase of the weapon, have been working on this thing for four years. They've worked separately, in three different sections of the country, with only an occasional meeting to coordinate their progress. Now the project is completed and to be put before the military. Thus, the meeting of the minds. It's top secret."

"And where is this powwow to be held?" another agent had asked.

"Sixty-six," Holly had said, using the code number of a northern city. I don't know exactly when, but within the week. Doctor Herchenfelder is the coordinator, and your man, Desiree. He's here in Washington. You'll travel with him as his wife.

"Each of the minds will go to Sixty-Six on his own with one of you people as a sidekick. Each has a code color. Herchenfelder is Black, the other two eggheads Blue and Gray. The military men are Red, Orange and Yellow. In Sixty-Six, they'll check in with Herchenfelder. He'll set up the exact time and place for the meeting."

Then Holly had repeated his warning: "This will be a collection of great minds, ladies and gentle-



DESIREE FLEMING

men. The loss of even one would be a tremendous blow to the United States. The outside dangers, of course, are Moscow, Peking, Hanoi—you name it. The entire Red bloc."

"My understanding is the TX project, put into use, could bring a quick end to the Vietnam scrap and prevent others from flaring. Desiree, your man will be double trouble. Herchenfelder doesn't like the idea of us being assigned. He especially doesn't like the notion of suddenly acquiring a wife."

The attractive girl agent had found Doctor Samuel Herchenfelder to be a remarkably ordinary-looking man somewhere in his mid-thirties, a man totally dedi-

cated to his work and holding complete disdain for her presence.

"Cloak and dagger, Miss Fleming," he had snorted, "is for writers, not for scientists. What kind of a person are you?"

"A girl," she had said simply because she had not been sure he had noticed. "And equally dedicated, bud, to keeping you healthy."

"Phooie!"

But he had tolerated her because he had had no choice, and they had arrived in Sixty-Six by train and had claimed the reservation at the midtown hotel. Desiree Fleming had been surprised at the size and the luxury of the suite, and she had noticed immediately that someone had been discreet in selecting a suite with bedrooms at the opposite ends of the main room. The discretion had amused her and had brought Doctor Herchenfelder to a crossroad.

"Your choice, Miss Fleming," he had said stiffly as he stood surveying the main room. "Right or left?"

Desiree had taken the bedroom on the left.

"You too?" she had asked, unable to curb the barb.

He had colored slightly, but he had maintained his dignity and had turned into the bedroom to his right. She had laughed softly. He had closed his door.

And then the calls had come in and the meeting had been scheduled for two the following after-

noon in the Herchenfelder suite.

Doctor Herchenfelder had gone into a shower. She had sat curled in a deep chair in the main room, sipping a weak highball she had finally managed to talk him into preparing. And a sixth call had come in. The voice on the line had been coarse. The voice that had called to her out of the fog on a deserted street corner had been shrill. It had been her only warning. And now . . .

Doctor Samuel Herchenfelder was the epitome of indignation and disbelief when Desiree awakened him. He clamped a top sheet tight against his Adam's apple.

"You!" he burst. "What are you doing in my bedroom?"

She rammed his black-rimmed glasses on his nose. He snapped his head away. Then it snapped back, and he goggled. "What—happened to you?"

"I thought you might see things differently with your glasses, Sam."

"Please, Miss Fleming—"

She left the edge of the bed and went to a dresser mirror.

"Don't push me," she snapped. "I've had a bad hour and it's beginning to catch up with me."

She inventoried her reflection. She had left the coat in the main room. Her short, black hair, normally worn unkempt, was a rat's nest now; her gold-coated lips smeared. The knees and thighs of her Capri pants were wet and black with grime. She put her back

to the mirror, looked over her shoulder. Same thing.

She glanced at her palms. They were gritty. One gold-coated fingernail had been broken. She wiped her palms on the Capri legs. The Capris were ruined anyway. Then Desiree took the tiny gun from the shoulder holster and hefted it at the scientist.

He popped up in the bed. The sheet was dropped and suddenly forgotten. He gaped.

"Shut up," said Desiree, "or I may be forced to use this gun to drive some common sense into that egg head of yours, Sam." She holstered the gun. "And that's the way it's going to be from now on, understand? Sam and Desiree. I'm tired of mouthing your last name. It's too much handle. And I don't like to be called Miss Fleming. It makes me sound as if I'm a debutante coming out. I'm not. I'm an agent for a bureau of the United States government. I'm the casual type. I'm uninhibited. I'm— Damn it, Sam, quit gawking at me as if you've never seen an angry female before!"

"Miss . . . Miss . . ."

"Desiree!"

"Desiree—" He gulped, stared, then he seemed to gather himself and he thundered, "Desiree, what the devil happened to you? Where have you been? You look as if you've been—been in a fight! You look as if—"

He left the bed, wrapped him-

self in the blue robe, belted it securely at his middle, slid his feet into the slippers.

"Thank God," Desiree breathed. "Suddenly you're human. Come on out here, Sam, and mix us a highball. And make it a decent highball this time. You aren't going to like what I have to tell you, not one bit."

She went into the main room. He trailed her. She shrugged out of the shoulder rig and took it and her coat into the other bedroom. When she returned, she watched him pour bourbon from a bottle into glasses without measuring. He dropped in ice cubes, poured water from a pitcher.

The drink he handed her was a brown color. She was satisfied. She dropped on a couch, kicked off a loafer and curled a leg under her. He sat on the edge of a deep chair opposite her.

"Now," Desiree said, "I'm going to explain some facts of life, Sam, and I want you to listen."

His immediate reaction to her recount of the last hour was continued disbelief. He sat shaking his head, his eyes hung on some unseen object on the thick carpeting. Desiree kicked off the other loafer and wiggled toes with gold-painted nails as she drank appreciatively from the glass.

"What all this boils down to, Sam, is tomorrow afternoon's meeting is off."

He surprised her. He said softly,

"Isn't that exactly what someone wants, Miss—er, Desiree?"

She frowned.

"The way I see it," he continued, "we play straight into the hands of these people, whoever they are, if I postpone tomorrow. You said it yourself: sprawled there on the sidewalk, you were a perfect close range target. You could have easily been killed, but you were not. Doesn't that suggest that these people merely are trying to frighten us off?"

"It suggests I am living with a rabbit's foot in my pocket and that someone was a darn poor shot."

"Perhaps. But I'm not going to be swayed, Desiree. I think the intent was to frighten."

"What if I'd gone out and not returned tonight?"

"Well, naturally I'd be disturbed."

"Thanks a bushel."

"What I mean, Miss Fleming, is, I'm not totally oblivious to the fact that you are a human being and, well, female."

"Watch it, Sam. Something hidden in you is beginning to seep out."

He said nothing. He drank.

Desiree pressed, "If I had disappeared wouldn't that have told you and yours to vamoose, get out of town?"

"No."

Desiree exploded, "Sam, the man on the phone wanted you! He wanted Doctor Samuel Herchen-

felder! His only trouble was he didn't know you! He didn't know whether you were male or female! I admit that female bit threw him off stride, but he bought it! And, point, Sam—the man wanted to warn you about a plot against your life!"

"You said the man who shot at you was not the man who called. How do you explain that, young lady?"

"I suspicion that your friend was somehow discovered. I have a hunch he now is dead. I think a substitute was sent to Eighth and Crowly. I think the substitute was supposed to kill me."

"Sam, the hierarchy of our foe is not stupid. The hierarchy knows you, knows you are a man. Only the henchmen might be uninformed, might make the mistake your friend did. But not the hierarchy. And the hierarchy, in this case, attempted to make a good hand out of a bad hand. A card had been put face up on the table. They were forced to call the hand. They did. They sent someone else to meet me, knowing damned well who I am. If the gunman had been successful it would have left you a sitting duck."

"Imaginative," Sam breathed in wonder.

"Imaginative? The guy who shot at me wasn't imaginary!"

"Miss Fleming," he said, suddenly turning serious, "do you actually want me to believe that

some unknown persons intend to kill me?"

"It's exactly what I want you to believe!"

"Why now? Why has there never before been an attempt to—"

"Because," she said, forcing patience, "these people probably just discovered what you and your pals are up to."

"I can't believe that. No one really knows what we have."

"No one has to. All they have to know is that you do have *something*."

He pushed at his glasses. "We weren't sure ourselves until ten days ago."

"Sam, the word gets around. Don't be naive. Look at Holly, my boss. He doesn't know what you have, yet he knows that you have *something*. He knows that it is a new weapon. He knows the name of the project is TX."

"He was told."

"All right. Look at me. See how much I know? See how much the other agents know? Two days ago we didn't. Today we do. Because Holly passed the information along to us. The same information can get bandied around until it reaches other people, too.

"They don't have to know anything. All they need is a hint that something big is in the wind. All they need is a name dropped here and there, a name of someone who is a part of this big something that could be disastrous to them."



"But this is all very hush-hush."

"Was," Desiree corrected.

"Only fifteen, perhaps sixteen, people know anything! We who have worked on TX, the military, your man Holly, you agents, the Secretary of—"

"Enough," said Desiree flatly. "Enough people to have the word get out. Sam, you've got to call this thing off. You and probably some of the others are in personal danger."

"No," he said bluntly.

Desiree stared at him. Suddenly she left the couch and went to the telephone. Sam was with her instantly. He clamped a firm hand on hers, forced the receiver back into the hook.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"Holly has to know."

"No."

Again he surprised her. He took her shoulders and he sent her stumbling across the room. She swelled. "Sam, I'm warning you. I can take you so fast you'll think you've been hit by an army."

"If we don't meet tomorrow, we will on a later day," he said. "Where and when doesn't matter. If our enemies know now, they'll know then. We're all here now. We're assembled. The meeting is set. We can have it finished in an hour. That's all, Miss Fleming. One hour.

"The military will buy or they won't. If they do, no one is going to kill all six of us. Attempts may be made, but some of us will escape. If the military doesn't buy, myself and my two scientists counterparts are expendable anyway."

"Holly has to know!"

Desiree waited for his leap at her. But he stood his ground, protecting the telephone. He used a stiff forefinger to poke the black-rimmed glasses back up his nose. Desiree took a step toward him.

"Hold it, Desiree—"

"Sam?"

The threats hung in the room. Then suddenly he seemed to concede. His shoulders sagged. He looked down at the carpeting, he shuffled and he moved away from the telephone.

"All right," he said in a subdued voice, "you win."

Desiree Fleming stood rooted in surprise for a moment, and then she leaped for the telephone. He was behind her. She began to dial the special Washington number. She had dialed the fourth digit when she heard the hiss of indrawn breath. She looked over her shoulder. She had just enough time to see the extended hand, the chopped blow sweeping down to her neck—then there was only blackness.

When Desiree came awake, she had a pounding headache and the sensation that her wrists were bound. She twisted up on her side. At least her feet were free and she knew that she was on a bed. She stretched her neck and looked over her head. What looked like severed lamp cords held her wrists against the bedposts. Desiree struggled.

"Useless, Miss Fleming," said a remarkably satisfied voice to her right.

Desiree snapped her head, stared at Doctor Samuel Herchenfelder. He was seated in a wing chair across the bedroom. His legs were crossed, he was smoking a cigarette, and he looked comfortable.

"I learned my karate at the YMCA," he said casually. "You?"

"The YWCA," Desiree Fleming snapped.

He nodded. "I had the impression you recognized the blow. What belt do you cherish?"

"Let me up from here, you fool!"

"Careful, Miss Fleming. Anger will reap no harvest."

"Holly has to know!"

Sam seemed to settle lower in the wing chair. Desiree fumed. He smoked. "I have been sitting here, Miss Fleming, and I have been thinking." He drew on the cigarette, blew out smoke. "I have also reached a couple of conclusions. A scientist's prerogative, you know. I've concluded that in addition to being attractive you are a very imaginative young lady.

"I've concluded that because of this imagination and because you are new in your work—you must be new, you are not old enough to be experienced in anything—you tend to allow this imagination to sway decisions.

"Now, long ago, I learned to appreciate imagination, but I also, through years and experience, have learned to examine its product guardedly. Thus I am inclined to be cautious when another person's imagination is designed to have a direct effect on me."

Desiree struggled fiercely against the cord shackles. "Let me free, you fool!"

He considered her. "Only if you promise to settle down. Only if you promise not to telephone your superior. You have failed to discover one thing about me, Miss Fleming. I may be an egghead, but it does not necessarily follow that I am a coward. Nor are my colleagues.

"My entire scientific life has

been in the field of weaponry. Ditto for Blue and Gray. And we are not totally naive men, as you seem to think. We are aware that because of the nature of our work there always has existed, and does exist, an element of personal danger.

"We are aware that there are other governments deeply interested in our findings, that some of these governments will go to almost any means to pick our brains, or to keep this nation from reaping the fruits. On the other hand—"

Desiree broke in, "Very fancy words! So you guys don't run scared."

He nodded. "In a nutshell. In spite of your sarcasm, Miss Fleming—precisely."

"And that's supposed to fill me with relief? That's supposed to make Holly wonder why he even bothered to send his people out here in the first place?"

"A point I attempted—and failed—to make with your Mr. Holly several days ago."

"A lot of people have a stake in what you have stored inside your head, Sam. Take a look at a big chunk of the world. These people live free lives, for the most part, because of men like you. They depend on you to keep them alive and free. They depend on your mind and the minds of others. They don't want the man or the mind destroyed."

"And that's Holly's job. That's

my job. To keep you alive and healthy and thinking. If you had been, you and I would be on a train or a bus or a plane or a go-cart, anything, and heading back into Washington this very instant.

"Come on; cut me loose. My arms are beginning to tingle and I have a monstrous headache. I'm not going to run, Sam. I'm not going to scream. If you think we can ride this thing out sans bloodshed, I'll be a fool and go along, against my better judgment."

He left the chair and untied the knots in the cords. "I suppose I'll now have to pay the hotel for a pair of lamps."

"You can always tell them that someone broke in here and attempted to electrocute you."

"Knock it, Miss Fleming."

She stopped rubbing her wrists and looked up at him in surprise. "Why, Sam! I do believe you have become domineering."

"I can be. Can I trust you?"

"Can you?"

They stared at each other for several seconds without moving. They allowed their eyes to talk. Desiree kept the challenge in hers. He probed. Finally he stood erect. "I'm going to bed, Miss Fleming. Tomorrow already has all the earmarks of a tiring day." He left her bedroom.

Desiree knew a pinch of satisfaction. She was gaining ground on Doctor Samuel Herchenfelder. He had not closed her door when he

had left the bedroom. She watched him cross the main room, enter his bedroom. He also left that door ajar.

Desiree found aspirin in her purse and spent fifteen minutes in her bath. She knew a tremendous urge to loll in the tub of hot water, watch the water pink the natural tan of her skin, but she also was aware of the danger.

She towed quickly and returned to the bedroom, and put on fresh clothing. She examined her reflection in a mirror. She liked the fit of the yellow Capris. They should give Doctor Samuel Herchenfelder something to think about in the morning now that his eyes were slightly open. Something other than weaponry, that is.

Desiree opened her bedroom door wide. The main room was dark now, but she noticed that the bedroom door at the opposite end remained ajar. All seemed quiet and normal. She repaired her broken fingernail, put a fresh coating of gold on her lips, then took the gun from its holster and snapped out the light.

Waiting until her eyes had adjusted to the darkness, she crossed the main room on silent bare feet and stood outside the other bedroom door. The telephone was on the stand near her left hand. It was inviting. All she had to do was close the door before her, pick up the receiver and dial the Washington number.

On the other hand, the dedicated man who was now snoring softly in the bedroom was also displaying a trust in her. To shatter that trust would make an enemy, and, she admitted ruefully, she didn't want Doctor Samuel Herchenfelder an enemy. Underneath all of that science veneer he was a nice lunk. He might show a girl a good time in Washington sometime.

Desiree pushed the bedroom door wide open, stood looking on the huddled shadow in the bed for a few moments, then turned from the temptation of the telephone. She found a straight-back chair and drew it up to the couch. She put the gun on the seat of the chair, propped two pillows and stretched out on the couch.

The door to the suite was in her side vision. A bedroom was straight ahead. The gun was within a sweep of her hand. No one was going to enter the suite, by door or window, and kill Sam.

But, Desiree Fleming wondered, as she lay with her arms cradled against the back of her head, who was the adversary in their camp. Someone among them—one of the scientists, one of the military men, one of the agents, Holly—had tipped the other side. No one else had known just what hotel suite the Herchenfelders were to occupy and yet there had been a telephone call from a would-be defector in the enemy garrison.

The following morning, Desiree

had coffee brought up to the suite while Sam shaved, then she had a second thought. She told the white-jacketed boy to wait and she poked her head into the bedroom. The bath door was closed tight.

"Hey," she called out.

"What?" The bath door did not open.

"I'm going to order breakfast sent up. What's your meat?"

"We can go down to the dining room later."

"Sent up," she said firmly. "I'm running this end of the show. Orderer."

There was hesitation behind the door, then an order issued in clipped words. She repeated the order to the boy and added, "The same for me." She closed the bedroom door.

Doctor Samuel Herchenfelder wanted to be peeved when he finally joined her in the main room. She was in the middle of her morning exercise. Her bare feet were spread and she was doing eagle bends, the gold tips of her right hand touching the gold tips of her left toes and vice versa, when he came from the bedroom.

Desiree looked at him from the upside down position and between her legs, and she saw the set of his jaw. He stopped. His eyes behind the black-rimmed glasses changed. She wanted to laugh, but she straightened and turned on him, taking satisfaction in the knowledge that she had been correct.

about the yellow Capris. They put him off balance. She wanted him that way. He would be easier to manage.

Desiree said brightly, "I exercise every morning. Don't you?"

His eyes had found the chair at the couch, the propped pillows. He frowned. She took the gun from behind the pillows. "I hid the gun when the boy came with the coffee. I didn't think he'd understand."

"You slept there?"

"I repeat, Sam, my job is to keep you alive." She took the gun into the bedroom, returned. He was pouring coffee from the pot into the two cups.

"Will you allow me to govern our day—at least, until after this afternoon's meeting?" she asked seriously.

"It appears," he said, "that I've already conceded."

"It won't be that bad, Sam. I promise. We can always send a boy out to buy us a Scrabble game."

His glance scorched her. He passed her a cup on a saucer. She turned to the couch, forgetting the straight-back chair. She curved back from the chair. The coffee spilled from the cup, splashed against her thighs. Desiree cried out and danced across the room, then stood with the cup and saucer in hand, struggling to stem the oaths as she looked down on her stained legs.

Desiree went into the bedroom, slammed the door behind her. There were no more Capris in the suitcase. She removed a skirt, hesitated, knew fresh anger. She had a religion against wearing loafers with skirts, yet the only garter belt she had brought along was the special belt issued by the Bureau. The belt was a weapon.

She mumbled an oath at the thought of wearing a weapon when she was attempting to influence a man. On the other hand, he would not see the weapon.

She put on the belt and skirt, slid hose onto her legs, found spiked-heel shoes. And Doctor Samuel Herchenfelder surprised her again when she reentered the main room. She thought she saw more approval in his eyes for the skirt than she had seen for the yellow Capris.

He had cleansed her saucer and refilled her cup. She sipped the coffee. There was the knock on the door.

"Yes?" she called out.

"Breakfast, ma'am."

As she hesitated, the lock clicked and the door opened.

A middle-aged man, neat in a business suit and hat, stood on the threshold. The man held a large gun in his left hand. The muzzle of the gun was pointed straight at her middle. The man smiled briefly, touched the brim of his hat.

"Well, hello!" He entered the suite, moving Desiree back. His



eyes swung to the scientist. The muzzle of the gun swung to the scientist. The man grinned. "Hi, Doc."

Desiree waited for the boom of the large gun. She wanted to scream. But the boom did not come. The man said, "Easy, folks. Nobody gets hurt. We're going to take a little ride, that's all. My name is Gerald."

He gave Desiree a crooked grin. "You, sister. Face the wall. Hands against the plaster. Lean. There's a couple of things I want to check."

She obeyed. Gerald examined her thoroughly with his free hand. She suffered through the indignities.

"Okay, Miss Fleming," he finally said with a chuckle. "Stand free.

I wish we had some like you on our side." The chuckle took on brief stature.

And that's when Sam made his move. Desiree saw him telegraph it. He took time to swell before stepping toward Gerald. Gerald's move was quick as lightning. He lashed out with his free hand and the back of that hand slammed against Sam's ear, sending the scientist reeling. Sam fell to his knees at the couch. Desiree drew a breath, but Gerald hissed at her, "Don't!"

She stood her ground.

Gerald snapped, "The two of you listen good. We're walking out of here. We're going downstairs nice and easy like. We're leaving the hotel. There's a waiting car. It can be done with or without bloodshed. Take your choice. Let's move."

Desiree fell in beside Sam in the corridor. He had a hand cupped against his ear and every few seconds he shook his head. "Bells?" asked Desiree.

Sam said nothing. Gerald walked slightly behind them. Desiree glanced at him. He was smiling confidently. The gun was out of sight. "Just keep walking nice and easy, Miss Fleming."

Desiree was puzzled. Why hadn't Gerald killed both of them?

They rode the elevator down and started across the lobby. People cluttered the huge open area. No one seemed to pay any particular attention to them. Desiree won-

dered if Gerald would kill her in public. She veered off to her left. Gerald again showed deftness.

He flicked a foot between her ankles, sent her sprawling. She doubted if anyone in the entire lobby saw that foot upend her, but she was sprawled and Gerald was squatted on one side of her while Sam hovered on the other side.

"Desiree, are you hurt?" Sam seemed genuinely concerned and she took some consolation in that.

Then Gerald was hissing in her ear, "That was a foolish move, Miss Fleming." She felt fingers at the back of her neck. The fingers belonged to an expert. The fingers were against nerves. The fingers squeezed.

She didn't pass out, but she was numbed. She couldn't move. The two men helped her to her feet and she was conscious of the curious faces crowding around them. Then she heard Gerald placating the faces.

"It's all right, folks. The little lady had a dizzy spell. Some fresh air will fix her up just fine. Now if you folks right here will just let us through, please. That's it. Thank you, thank you—"

They left the hotel lobby, crossed a crowded sidewalk that was bathed in brilliant sunshine and Desiree was put into the back seat of a new sedan. Gerald told Sam to get in up front beside the driver, an olive-colored man with sharp features and the wire of a

hearing aid dangling from his left ear. Then Gerald joined Desiree. He no longer was smiling. "Sister, you should be dead. Roll, Frank."

Desiree Fleming wondered why she wasn't. Both she and Sam. Why they were not deeply puzzled her.

They were taken to a plush motel near an edge of the city. Gerald escorted them into a large unit. Desiree heard the sedan move away. She inventoried the expensive furnishings. She listened hard. She would have accepted almost any sound.

She had expected to be greeted by people. Gerald's friends. But there seemed to be no one. Two open doors ahead of her showed off bedrooms. There was a third door. To her left. It was closed.

Behind Desiree, Gerald called out, "Marnie?"

The closed door opened. A woman stood framed. She looked any age between forty and fifty-five, a preserved woman with a good figure. Her hair was blue rinse and piled high on top of her head. Her skin was smooth, contained a pinkish tint. Her face had been made up by an expert. A tiny smile played at the corners of her painted lips. She looked like a woman who never frowned.

Finally she said, "Hello." Her voice was low-pitched, modulated. Her eyes flicked to Sam. "Doctor," she said in greeting. The eyes danced back to Desiree and ex-

amined thoroughly. She laughed softly. It was a bubbly sound. She looked at Gerald, continued to be amused. "Mr. Holly is training them young these days, it seems."

"Doesn't it?" Gerald said.

"Quite attractive."

"Amen."

"You've examined her?"

"She's clean."

"And Doctor Herchenfelder?"

Gerald said nothing. Desiree heard the shuffle of his feet. The woman's eyes were briefly cold, briefly brilliant and hard, but the smile remained on her lips, and the eyes abruptly became soft again.

"You blundered, Gerald," she admonished.

"But he's an egghead."

"Examine him, please."

Gerald went over Sam with his hands. Sam started to protest. "Hey, what the devil—"

Gerald slammed a fist into Sam's middle, doubling the scientist, then he straightened Sam again.

"Stand quiet," Gerald ordered. He finished his examination, turned on the woman. "Nothing. Only a money belt. He's wearing a money belt."

"Examine it," said the woman.

Gerald ripped the shirt bottom from the top of Sam's trousers, removed the belt. Sam started to reach, then seemed to reconsider. He dropped his arm and stood rooted. His breathing was harsh, his eyes behind the black-rimmed

glasses a bit glossy. Desiree caught his eyes, shook her head, attempted to tell him to remain quiet.

Gerald went through the money belt, pitched it to the woman. She examined it, pitched it back. Gerald stuffed it in the scientist's coat pocket.

"All right. Put them in the middle bedroom, Gerald," the woman said.

Gerald escorted them. He stood in the doorway.

"Look out the window," he said.

Desiree looked, saw the sedan. The hood was up and the olive-colored man with the hearing aid was bent over the motor.

"Frank there?" asked Gerald.

"He's there," said Desiree.

"He'll be there. As long as you don't raise hell, you're free to roam the room. If you try anything foolish, if you make a lot of racket, you've had it. Understand?"

He didn't wait for an answer. He backed from the bedroom and closed the door quietly. Desiree listened for the snap of a lock and heard nothing.

Sam burst then, "My God, who are these people? What's going on? Why are we here? Why—"

"Easy." Desiree interrupted. She went to the large double bed, sat on the edge, crossed her knees. "We should be dead, but we're not, so we've still got a chance." Reflexively, she thumbed a garter strap under her skirt and along the top of her thigh. She had been

minutely searched, but she still had the single weapon.

"Who are these people?" Sam repeated.

Desiree went to the window and it was as if the man outside felt her presence. He looked up from the motor, his narrow face blank, dark eyes hard. He didn't move. She turned back.

"You can wager the last dollar in your money belt they don't represent the United States Government. And put your shirttail in. I want the man I'm going to die with to be neat in appearance."

He gasped. Then he wrapped the money belt around his middle, stuffed the shirttail into his trouser top. "Desiree, are these people agents of another government?"

"Now you're with it, boy."

"But that woman out there in the front room! She doesn't look like an agent! And that man! He looks like any business man you might see on a street!"

"And me?" Desiree asked with a cocked eyebrow.

Sam became flustered. "Well—"

"I'm an agent, too, remember?" she said.

Sam went to the window. "What's that man doing out there? Hey, he was our driver! Why is he working on—"

"He's there to make sure we don't go out the back way, Sam. And those two in the front room are where they are to make sure we don't—"

"They can't do this to us!" he exploded.

"You tell them that," said Desiree. Then she sat on the edge of the bed again. "Look, Sam, something about all of this isn't right. We should be dead."

"Can't you quit talking about dying? I've got a meeting to—"

"It's the part that isn't right. Why haven't we been killed? Why didn't Gerald kill us in the hotel? I don't like it, Sam."

"Well, I hope you won't be offended, Miss Fleming, if I admit aloud that I, for one, am happy to still be alive."

"Get off the high horse, Sam. We haven't been killed for a reason. One, it could be because they didn't want to clutter up the hotel with bodies. Two, it could be they don't want any bodies left lying around—anywhere. We might be just going to disappear. Or three—Sam, I think I've got it!"

"What?"

"How much of the TX project are you carrying around inside your skull?"

He looked confused. Desiree pressed: "If someone was to pick your brain, pick you clean, could you give them enough information so they'd know what the TX project is, how it operates?"

"I could give them one phase, but I won't."

"And the other two phases? You don't know anything at all about the work of Blue and Gray?"

"Well, certainly, I do—"

"What's been your end of this project? Design? Function? What?"  
"Function."

"It's your discoveries that will make the TX tick?"

"Yes," he said slowly.

"And Blue and Gray? They've concentrated on design?"

"Design and trajectory."

"You've been briefed on both?"

"Yes."

"Could you design a TX by yourself?"

"No."

"But could someone else, let's say a team skilled in design, trajectory, function, take what you know about the TX shape and components and put together a working facsimile?"

"Well, it's possible."

"All right, now let's reverse it. I assume you have discussed function with Blue and Gray."

"To a degree."

"From what you have passed along, could they design and successfully trigger a TX?"

"Absolutely not."

"You are positive?"

"My work has involved gas, Miss Fleming. It's—" He paused. His lips thinned. His jaw became set. "I'm not going to say anything more about it, to you or to anyone else."

"Blue and Gray do not know enough about this gas to—"

"They do not."

"Then that's it, Sam. That's why

you and I are here. I don't know where I'm going to be dumped, but I think you are going for a plane ride."

He scowled.

"You may find yourself in Hanoi, Moscow, anywhere, in the next few days. Be prepared."

"I won't tell them a thing!"

"You may have a change of heart. There are ways to break a man. And in the meantime here's something else to think about. Someone among us is an informer. Blue, Gray, one of the military people, one of the agents—"

Desiree Fleming explained and he had difficulty believing until she said, "No one else knew what suite the Herchenfelders had, Sam. Yet last night there was an extra call to the room. Today, Gerald hit the right door."

He suddenly looked defeated. "If you can't trust your own, what's the world coming to?"

"You're building the weapon, Sam."

The door opened. Gerald came a step into the room, stopped. "Doc?"

Sam stood frozen.

Gerald broke into a grin. "Come on, Doc. It's just going to hurt a little bit." And then he looped a fist upward that clipped the point of Doctor Samuel Herchenfelder's jaw and dropped the scientist to the carpeting.

Desiree shot up from the bed, became mesmerized. The woman

was in the doorway behind Gerald. She was smiling. She held a gun in her hand.

"Please?" she said politely.

Desiree folded back down on the edge of the bed. Sam was groaning, twitching on the carpeting. Gerald flipped Sam on his back, hooked hands in Sam's armpits and pulled him from the room. The woman nodded to Desiree.

"Breathe easy, dear," and closed the door again.

Desiree had the sinking feeling that she had seen Doctor Samuel Herchenfelder for the last time.

She was wrong. Ninety minutes later, Gerald came for her, took her into the front room. Sam sat stiffly in a deep chair. He looked totally confused, but unharmed. He was dressed. He was neat. The woman stood beside his chair. There was no gun in her hand now. She was smiling. She said, "All right, Gerald; return them to the hotel."

The sedan was outside, the olive-colored man at the wheel. Gerald put Sam in the front seat again, got into the back seat with Desiree.

"Roll, Frank," he said.

"Right."

Desiree jerked, then shuddered. Frank's voice was high-pitched. She was sure he was the man who had shot at her in the fog the previous night.

At the hotel, Gerald waved them out of the car. They stood together

on the sidewalk. The sun was bright. People scurried around them. The sedan rolled away and disappeared in the glut of traffic. Desiree caught Sam's arm. "Are you all right?"

He drew a breath, looked around. Suddenly he looked down at her. "I don't understand," he said. "I just don't understand."

"Don't figure you've got a corner on that market, buster."

"What time is it?"

Desiree looked at her wrist watch without thinking. "Five minutes before two."

"My meeting!"

Sam crossed the sidewalk. She caught him in the lobby of the hotel, stopped him. "Wait a minute," she cried out. "What happened to you back there? What did they do to you when they took you from the room?"

He looked briefly confused before he said firmly, "They gave me a shot."

"A—what?"

"A shot with a needle. They gave me a hypodermic. I slept. In fact, I feel as if I've slept for a week. I feel as rested as I've felt in months." He moved off.

"Sam, wait!"

He frowned at her over his shoulder, continued to stride toward the bank of elevators. "I've got to make the meeting, Desiree," he said. "The others will be waiting."

"No! Wait! Something isn't

right! Why would they give you a shot? Why did they bring us back here? Why—”

“We'll discuss it later,” he said and entered an elevator. She darted in to stand beside him. The elevator was crowded. Neither spoke as they were lifted to the eighth floor. They were the only two to get off on eight. Sam turned down the corridor toward the suite. Desiree caught his arm.

“Sam, think!”

He frowned on her. “I am thinking. I'm thinking you suddenly have become a nuisance. Please let go of my coat.”

“Sam, you can't go through with the meeting!”

“I—what?”

“I have a feeling, Sam! Don't ask me what it is! I just have this feeling! It's as if something is going to blow up in our faces!”

“You're upset, Desiree. And confused. Nothing turned out as you expected. Nothing—”

“Sam, remember one thing! Remember that someone among us is not on our side!”

He shook her off, continued along the corridor. She dashed after him. They found the door to the suite open. Two men—one in a military uniform and the other in a business suit—lounged in the doorway. But Desiree knew they were lounging with a purpose. They were blocking the entrance.

Desiree immediately recognized both agents. They parted for Sam.

He entered the suite. She went after him. The room was crowded. The buzz of idle conversation ended. She scanned the faces, recognized some as other agents.

“Sorry, gentlemen,” Sam said. “I went out for a package of cigarettes and was detained. Doctor Field hasn't arrived?”

Why had Sam lied, and who was Doctor Field?

Desiree tugged his coat sleeve. His look was the kind he might give an annoying child.

“I have to talk to you,” Desiree pleaded in a voice just above a whisper.

He ignored her. “Gentlemen, we can begin without Doctor Field,” he said to the room. “I will present the initial phase. Doctor Field's presence is not required for that, so if you other people, you people who *are not supposed to be here* will now kindly leave the suite, we can—”

“Doctor,” an agent broke in from across the room, “I think we are supposed to hang tight.”

“You can hang tight in the corridor, sir, if you must. What is to be discussed in this room in the next hour is not for general consumption.”

Agents shuffled. Eyes darted. Desiree took it in, then she blurted, “Sam, I must talk to you!”

A heavy silence descended on the room. All eyes turned to her. Sam looked at her, his face flushed, his eyes angry. But he whirled sud-

denly, caught her arm, marched her into a bedroom, and closed the door. "Young lady, I—"

"Who is Doctor Field?" she interrupted.

"Gray!"

"Where is he?"

"I don't know!"

"Why did you lie to those men out there? Tell them what happened to us, Sam! Tell them! They have a right to know they might be in danger!"

"Danger?" He snorted, yanked open the bedroom door. "Out, Miss Fleming," he said firmly. "Right on out to the corridor."

He turned to the main room. "All of you who are not supposed to be here—out! I am in charge now. Please leave, people. Please. Take up a vigil outside our door, if you must, but please leave the room so the rest of us can get on with our business."

There was a general shuffling. Glances were passed. Then one agent stood and left the room. Others followed. Desiree didn't move. Sam took her arm, put her in the corridor with her cohorts, closed the door. The agents muttered, mingled, looked at each other.

Finally one said, "All right, what can possibly happen to them in there, all cooped up together like hens in a chicken house?"

And another agent asked Desiree, "What's the matter with you, chick? What's bugging you?"

She rattled the whole story out.

The agents stood silent, listening, digesting, contemplating. They remained silent when she had finished, then one breathed, "Why a hypodermic?"

Another asked, "And why return him? They had him."

No one had answers and a third agent finally said, "Well, they're all snug now. Can you imagine how many governments would like to have ears in that room in the next hour and a half?"

"Can you imagine," murmured Desiree, "what one bomb in that room right now could do to the United States?"

She stood frozen, the enormity of her own words suddenly swelling her. She squealed and broke. She slammed into the meeting room and screamed, "Everyone out! Everyone out!"

No one moved. An agent burst in from the corridor. "Chick, have you lost your marbles?"

Desiree whipped up her skirt and simultaneously triggered the garter snaps on the front of her thighs. Two tear gas pellets popped from the snaps and burst on the carpeting.

There were shouts of protest, shouts of annoyance, shouts of disbelief. And then there was bedlam as the occupants of the room scrambled toward the open door. Desiree slammed into a wall. She stood plastered there.

She saw Sam staggering toward her, his fists digging into his eyes

under his black-rimmed glasses. She pushed off of the wall and rammed her palms against his chest. The blow sent him staggering backward. She saw him go down.

"Sam, Sam—" she murmured in despair; then she whirled and shot for the open door.

The explosion deafened her. She had the sensation she was being lifted and pitched on a hot wind—and then there was nothing.

Desiree came awake in a hospital room. Holly stood beside her bed. She looked around. She was alone with her chief. She attempted to lift her head, found that she could not.

"Hi, kid," Holly said in a gentle voice. "Don't try to move. You got a bum back out of the deal, but you and the others are alive."

"Sam?" she mumbled. She felt tears brimming her eyes.

Holly remained silent.

"S-Sam, the—the secret weapon," she quavered.

The thought was ludicrous. She thought she should laugh. She could not.

"From what I've been able to piece together," said Holly, "from what you told the others, Marnie and her pals rigged his money belt while he slept. He was timed to explode."

"He was a nice guy, Chief. I liked him."

"We've picked up Doctor Field. He was on his way to Buenos Aires with a suitcase full of money. We missed Marnie and her friends, but we'll get her some day. She and I are ancient adversaries."

"I liked Sam, Chief."

"He was dedicated and perceptive. He knew that someday something like this could happen to him. It's all down on tape, Desiree. Everything Sam had in his head. And there's only one person in the world who knows where the tape is."

She stared up at Holly. "When are you going to get it, Chief?"

"When I leave here."

"Then I think I'll sleep. I'm very tired."

"You do that, kid."

She slept with an image of Doctor Samuel Herchenfelder, scientist extraordinary, alive in her mind.

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# Never Too Good—To Die



*No one can die twice, she told herself. And then, seeing the tight, mad look in his face . . . Or—can they?*

by J. SIMMONS SCHEB

MYRA SAUNDERS was irritated that afternoon. She flicked on the windshield wiper and the headlights, glanced into the rear-view mirror and pushed at her dark brown hair.

"Damn!" she said aloud. The one time Antoine had done a half-way decent job, it had to pour down rain before she could get home.

Anyway, she thought as she pulled the car under the carport, she'd remembered to close the windows in the house. Nothing there would be wet if Charles hadn't been home some time during the day and opened them again.

She switched off the motor and heaved herself out from under the wheel. Myra was a big, bulky woman of thirty-eight in a bright scarlet suit that strained at the seams as she gathered up her packages and clicked her way over to the side door of her house.

The key wasn't under the mat, but when she tried the door it opened, and she made a mental note to speak to Charles about that. His carelessness was inexcusable.

Immediately, however, she knew it hadn't been Charles. Her kitchen was a mess. Every cupboard door was flung wide; half-open drawers spilled out dish towels, potholders, recipes. One of her favorite cups lay broken on the floor.

"Is someone here?" she shouted. "Is somebody in my house?"

Angrily, she marched across the kitchen and laid her packages on the counter. Then suddenly, fear swept over her. Somebody could be in her house. She spun around,

and there he was, crouching behind the open door.

At first he seemed to be all shoulders, just one big pair of shoulders in a wrinkled, dirty trench coat.

He made no sound. He simply crouched there, staring, holding her yellow-handled carving knife in his enormous gloved right hand.

Myra couldn't move. Her legs were paralyzed, her feet riveted to the floor. "Who—?" she demanded. "What—?"

He took one step forward, and she saw beady little eyes peering from beneath a battered rain hat, the blue-black stubble of a beard on fatty jowls, the thin, pale line that had to be his lips. She opened her mouth to scream but he rushed at her. A slash of sudden pain shot through her body, and as she slumped forward on to the floor, she heard her scream come out a moan.

He hesitated. She could see his big, ugly work shoes, planted inches from her face, and she could hear his heavy breathing, but the knife had fallen under her and he made no attempt to get it. Instead, he must have panicked, because the shoes turned suddenly and pounded away, and the side door slammed so violently that the whole house seemed to shake. She could hear his foot steps fade as he ran across the carport.

A long time later, Myra stirred and heard the living room clock

strike five. She raised her head. The pain in her side was excruciating and she found that her legs refused to obey. Tears rushed to her eyes. Sweat broke out on her forehead. Panic rose in her throat.

Myra laid her head down on her arms. Think! she told herself. Think!

It would be at least an hour and a half before Charles got home, and she wasn't at all sure she could last that long. The pool of blood beneath her was getting bigger with every heartbeat. Instinctively, she knew that life was draining out of her.

The phone was across the kitchen, high up on the wall. She judged the distance at about eight feet. Too far, but she had to try. Forcing herself up onto her elbows, she started edging towards it, dragging her legs behind. In the middle of the floor she collapsed, her elbows crumpling under her and her head bumping hard on the cold and unyielding stone. Tears came to her eyes again and streamed down the sides of her face.

"Why?" she demanded of the empty room. "Why should this happen to me?"

Her frustration turned to anger. A thousand times she had told Charles it was stupid to keep a key underneath the mat. Why hadn't he listened? After fifteen years of marriage, why couldn't he just once—

Someone was knocking at the

front door. "Come!" Myra tried to shout. But the shout was really a groan, not much more than a whisper. "Come!" she said again, but her voice was even weaker.

She waited. It would be Mrs. Armstrong, from across the street, coming to borrow something. Mrs. Armstrong was a withered, bony little woman who was none too bright, but at least she would know enough to call an ambulance.

Myra's lips moved. "Come in, Mrs. Armstrong. Come on in and borrow anything you want. I'm sorry I said that last night. I don't care if you *never* get organized. Just come in and save my life!"

The knocking stopped. Minutes passed, and Myra waited for footsteps to come around the side of the house to the door that led in from the carport. They didn't. They simply faded away.

"You idiot!" Myra cried, getting up to her elbows again. "Couldn't you see the car? You knew I must be home. Why didn't you come to the side door? You could have seen through the window!"

The phone began to ring. That would be Charles, calling to tell her he'd be late again. She looked up at it gratefully. Oh, Charles. Wonderful, wonderful Charles!

She ground her teeth and began to crawl again. Slowly and painfully she went, leaving a trail of warm blood behind her. By the end of the fourth ring she was under the instrument, desperately trying

to pull her useless legs into a useable position. A yard above her head the phone continued to ring, four more times, five, six.

"I'm coming!" she tried to scream, clutching and clawing at the smooth yellow wall dancing in front of her. At last, she made it. Her legs were uncertain but they were under her, and she snatched the receiver from the hook just in time to hear a click.

"Charles," she murmured. "Charles!"

The dial tone answered her.

Myra Saunders sank to the floor again, crying silently. "Damn you, Charles. Damn you! You knew I'd be here. I'm always here, fixing dinner for you. How could you hang up!"

The clock chimed for half past five. One more hour to go. Surely, he'd come at 6:30. Surely, he wouldn't be late tonight, when he hadn't been able to reach her.

Above her head, the receiver dangled and the dial tone buzzed on. Myra closed her eyes, counted twenty heartbeats and opened her eyes again when she heard the sound of voices.

For the first time she realized that it had stopped raining, and the kids next door were playing in their yard.

"Oh, thank heavens," Myra breathed. "Mark! Mason! Come help me. Bring your friends. Come over in my yard and up to the window and find me. Let your ball hit

against my house. I won't take it away. I promise."

The side door was now about four feet from her, and from this angle, she could see that it wasn't quite closed. The man must have slammed it so hard it had bounced back open again. She had to get to get to it!

Her hopes soared, and she began to crawl one more. The voices were like music—young, high voices, not quite ready to change. There must have been five or six of them. She could even hear the crack of bat on ball, and just as she got to the door, there was a resounding thump. The ball had hit her house.

Ignoring the pain, she scrambled the last few inches, got to her knees and threw the door open. lunged through it, felt the wound open wider as she scraped across the threshold and down the little step into the carport.

"Boys," she whimpered. "Boys!"

A pair of running dungarees crossed her line of vision. A cry rang out. "We'd better get out of here!"

There was the sound of running feet again, then silence. They had probably knocked down a plant or put a dirty mark on her house. And then the little brats had run!

Fresh tears ran down Myra's cheeks. Her head throbbed; her elbows were on fire. She could hear the cars going by on the street. Men—more faithful men than Charles—were hurrying home



from their offices. Flighty, frivolous women were rushing home from bridge in time to stick frozen dinners in their ovens. Her shoulders jerked with sobs.

"Why?" she demanded. "Why?"

No one looked her way. No one stopped or even slowed. She knew they wouldn't. Not one single solitary Good Samaritan lived on Sandcastle Lane.

Movement finally caught her eye. She was lying face down, sandwiched between her car and the door, in front of a screen breezeway through which she could see across her own backyard and the Hartmans' and on into the Hartman house.

Myra's pulse began to quicken. Beth Hartman was standing behind that door and waving.

"Beth!" Myra breathed. "Beth! I should have known you'd help me."

It had been nearly six months since she and Beth Hartman had spoken, but Beth wouldn't hold a grudge at a time like this. Not just because Myra had poisoned their cat! After all, Myra's was a human life!

Myra inched her way forward, and when she got to the front of her car, she could see that the lights were burning. So that was it! She'd left the lights on after the rain, and Beth was signaling her.

"Oh, Beth! Beth! Come on over. Please come over and find me!" Myra raised up on her hands,

pressed her face hard against the screening of the breezeway. "Look, Beth. See me. Come over and save my life!"

The pain was too much to bear. She collapsed again and lay with her face in her arms, waiting for Beth to come. Certainly, she'd come. She wouldn't just stand there waving. Sooner or later, she'd wonder why Myra hadn't responded, and she'd come over to tell her about the car lights.

"Come, Beth, come. See me. Save me." It sounded like a first grade reader. And ironically enough, Myra thought, the whole thing was so elementary. All Beth had to do was walk across the yard.

Myra waited a long time before she raised her head again and saw that Beth was turned around waving in the other direction. A tremendous sob rose into her throat, threatening to choke her. Beth Hartman had to be purposely avoiding even looking at the Saunders house. She was simply washing her sliding glass door!

"Please, Beth, please! Look at my house, see that my car lights are on and then come over to tell me! I won't scream at your child. She can pick all the flowers she wants!"

Beth Hartman squatted down, as if to examine the door for streaks, then went back inside and closed the full-length draperies.

Myra's head dropped down into her arms again, and nausea swept

over her. She hated Beth Hartman and all the other stupid, self-centered, grudge-holding people in the world.

With her last bit of strength she rolled over onto her back and lay staring up at the ceiling. She would simply wait for Charles. The pain was too great now, and she was far too exhausted to try any more.

The neighborhood sounds died away, and the sun was sinking rapidly. Everyone had gone inside to eat. No one could possibly find her now except Charles. She was almost hidden from the street by the car and the darkness, and it was extremely unlikely that anyone else would come. She decided she was glad. Never once during the five years she had lived in the house had she asked a favor of a neighbor. She didn't need one now.

She had no idea of the time, but it was completely dark when she heard Charles' car. He parked in the driveway, slammed the door and walked towards her very slowly.

She could see his tall, lean silhouette outlined against the moonlight as he stepped to the edge of the carport. He hesitated, then hurried to her, knelt down and took hold of her wrist.

"Myra!" he said hoarsely.  
"Myra?"

She couldn't answer. Her lips wouldn't move, but she tried to flutter her eyelids. Call Jim! she tried

to tell him. I'm hurt, but I'm alive. I can make it if you get hold of Jim right now.

He was agonizingly slow. "Move, Charles, move!" she commanded mentally. "Can't you see that I'm bleeding to death?"

At last he got up and hurried to the phone. She could hear him dialing the number. Oh, thank you, Charles, she thought. Thank you! Thank you! I'll forgive you for everything.

For everything? She heard his voice, low-pitched and edged with anger. "Sabino?" he was saying. "She's alive."

Sabino? Jim's name wasn't Sabino. It was Fox.

"She isn't dead, I tell you. No . . . no . . . I couldn't! I paid you . . ." He broke off, listened a minute, then clicked the receiver into place. For an eternity, there was nothing. Then his footsteps crossed the kitchen again and he came outside. The car lights went out and he closed the door quietly, then went back into the house. Myra was left in total darkness.

"Oh, no!" she cried silently. "Charles! Please! Don't leave me here to die. You can have the divorce. Marry your little tramp. I won't stop you. I won't even ask for alimony. And I'll never tell on you, Charles. I promise I won't tell! Just save me, Charles. Please save me!"

It was almost as if he'd heard her. His footsteps were coming back again. They were slow, but they were coming. She had known he couldn't do it. Charles Saunders wasn't the type. He didn't have the nerve.

"Hurry, stupid, hurry!" Her throat ached, and her brain was bursting into flames. She would get him for this. If it was the last thing she ever did, she would get him.

And then he was standing over her.

"No, Charles, no! I'll give you the divorce. I'd never hurt you, Charles. I've never hurt anyone. I've been a perfect wife. You know it. Put that pillow down, Charles. You idiot! You'll never get away with . . ."



# MURDER

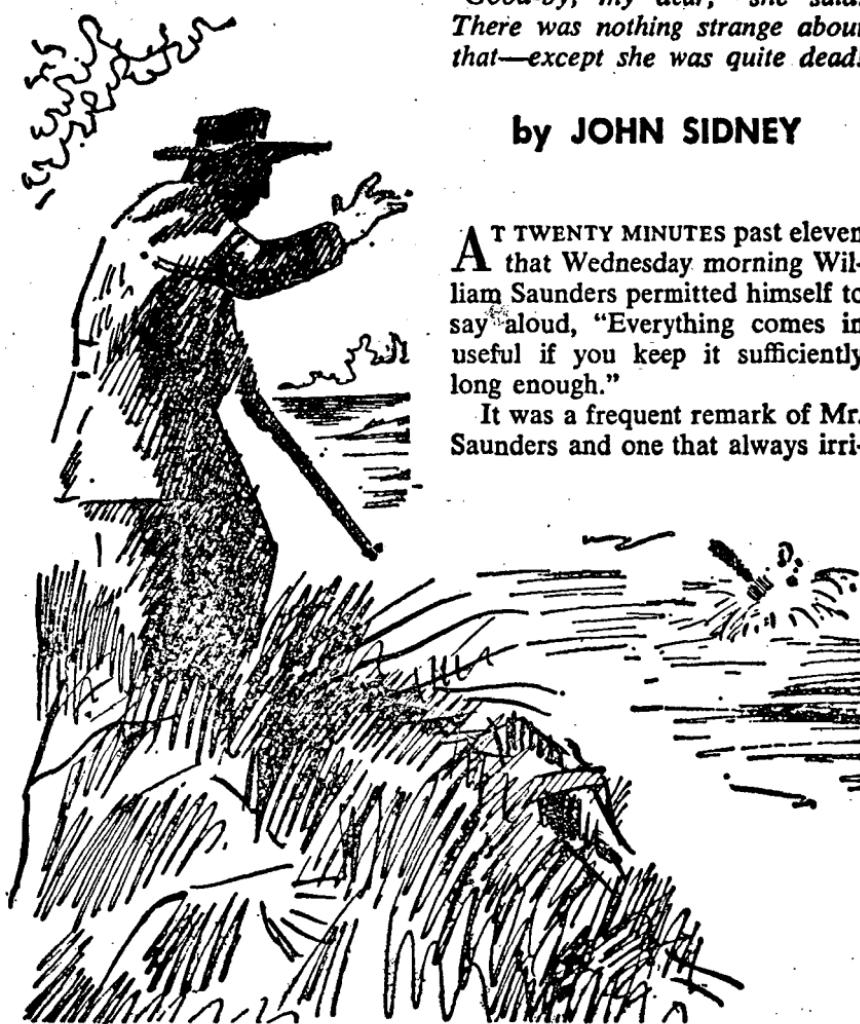
## off the record

*"Good-by, my dear," she said.  
There was nothing strange about  
that—except she was quite dead!*

by JOHN SIDNEY

AT TWENTY MINUTES past eleven that Wednesday morning William Saunders permitted himself to say aloud, "Everything comes in useful if you keep it sufficiently long enough."

It was a frequent remark of Mr. Saunders and one that always irri-



tated his wife but could not do so on this occasion. Three minutes earlier, Mr. Saunders, as he had planned for months, had killed Mrs. Saunders as she lay in bed.

Mr. Saunders had chosen a Wednesday because that was their servant's day off. He had chosen this Wednesday because their old friend, Mr. Joseph Reynolds, of London, was staying at the Saunders' Hampshire home and would, unwittingly, corroborate the alibi Mr. Saunders was at this moment preparing.

Mrs. Saunders never rose before noon, but lolled in bed, eating chocolates and listening to television. That practice, as much as her money, had made Mr. Saunders plan her murder.

Three minutes earlier Mr. Saunders had delivered a few neat precise blows with what he confidently anticipated would appear in the police reports as "a blunt instrument."

In point of fact, it was a hammer and at the moment it was in Mr. Saunders' shooting bag. During the next half hour, while out in his fields seeking hares with Mr. Reynolds, Mr. Saunders would drop the hammer in the river.

As he busied himself in his wife's bedroom, making it appear that she had been struck down by a burglar, Mr. Saunders congratulated himself on keeping that early tape recording of his wife's voice. They had made it together one

night three years ago, when Mr. Saunders had first bought the tape recorder and when their relations had been rather better.

Mrs. Saunders had spoken a number of random phrases and sentences which Mr. Saunders had snipped out and joined together a few nights earlier and now proposed to put to good use.

Mr. Saunders rapidly tossed out the contents of wardrobes and drawers and filled his pockets with her jewelry—the pearl necklace, the diamond brooch, the three rings—one he took off her finger—and the bracelet of sapphires.

These, too, would go into the river in the next half hour. It was a pity, Mr. Saunders commented to himself, but he'd be a fool not to play safe.

Mr. Saunders, fifty-five, dapper, with a neat mustache, stood still and checked his work, including the still figure on the bed whose money he would now inherit, satisfied himself that he bore no blood stains, and then turned on the recording machine.

It would play silently for five minutes—time enough, as Mr. Saunders had planned, for him to call Reynolds from his room, where he was writing letters.

Mr. Saunders went downstairs slowly with Mr. Reynolds, unobtrusively stealing glances at his watch. He was a few seconds ahead of time.

"I have timed it as neatly as a

well-planned military operation," Mr. Saunders told himself. "Everything is possible if it is tackled in the right way. Perhaps, if I had had better luck during the war and fewer fools over me, I might have emerged as one of the great leaders."

Mr. Saunders sternly called himself back to business. It was twenty-nine minutes and forty seconds past eleven.

"Take it slowly to her door and pause for eight seconds," Mr. Saunders told himself. "Wait. Wait. Wait. Now it is time."

Mr. Saunders spoke, "Good-by, Lucy. We're off now."

Here it came. "Good-by, William. Have a good time."

"Yes, we will," said Mr. Saunders.

"I'll stay in bed and listen to the radio while you're away."

It had been a joke with them then, three years ago. Mr. Saunders had laughed on the tape.

Remembering now, Mr. Saunders laughed before saying: "All right, dear."

Joseph Reynolds called out his farewell, "Good-by, Mrs. Saunders."

Mr. Saunders allowed himself to congratulate himself on what happened next. Music swelled up in Mrs. Saunders' bedroom.

"She's turned the radio on. I don't think she heard you," said Mr. Saunders. "Let's go."

As he and Reynolds gathered



up their shot guns in the hall and went outside, they could still hear the music distantly.

"Lucy is keen on the Light Program," offered Mr. Saunders. "Listens to it by the hour." And told himself, "That was a masterly touch—to link up that old tape recording of a B.B.C. light music broadcast. But there's a use for everything if you keep it long enough. Joe Reynolds has no ear, I know, and will recall only that there was music."

In the next twenty minutes, as he had planned, Mr. Saunders separated himself from his guest. There was no one to see as he tossed the hammer and the jewelry into the river.

Mr. Saunders shot well. He bagged three hares, all of them difficult. At twelve-thirty, they returned to the house for lunch. In the drive Mr. Saunders made an excuse to hurry ahead, called out to his wife, ran up the stairs, switch-

ed off the tape machine, carried it to his bedroom and hid it in a cupboard, doubled back to the bedroom and switched on his bedside radio.

"Funny!" thought Mr. Saunders. "It's dead. But it's no matter."

Then he pretended to call out in well-pretended horror and his guest came racing up. After that there was the doctor and the policeman. While he told his story Mr. Saunders thought only lightly of the recording machine.

When things were settled down a little, there would be an opportunity to destroy that dangerous little roll of tape.

"I said good-by to my wife about half-past eleven," Mr. Saunders was telling the village constable. "She answered me and said something about us having a good time."

Mr. Saunders watched the thick-set elderly constable writing slowly in his notebook.

That was a nice touch, thought Mr. Saunders, not to be too precise . . .

"She said she would listen to the radio," said Mr. Saunders and waited for Mr. Reynolds.

"I can confirm this," said Mr. Reynolds. "I heard her answer, 'Good-by. I will listen to the radio.' She turned it on because she didn't hear me say 'Good-by.' The music came on quite loud though I can't say what they were playing."

The constable wet his pencil and then wrote.

"Something on the Light Program," said Mr. Saunders.

"I have no ear for music," said Mr. Reynolds. "I was trying to place what it was when we were in the hall."

"In the hall—downstairs?" asked the constable, frowning. "You are sure of that, sir?"

"Positively," said Mr. Reynolds, frowning.

Mr. Saunders was watching the constable's face and he felt his own growing tighter.

The constable was pursing his lips.

"There was Mrs. Dale's Diary up to 11:15 on the Light Program," said the constable. "After that, no music. I had the set on at the station—"

"But I heard the music, constable," said Reynolds. "It was just after half-past eleven. The music came up—I have no ear for tunes—but I'd swear to the time."

"There was no music," said the policeman. "There couldn't have been—" The constable went on talking and his eyes bored suspiciously into Mr. Saunders. Mr. Saunders listened and knew he was undone.

"You see, sir, there was a power breakdown and the transmitter at Droitwich, which serves this area, went off the air . . ."



# SOLILOQUY

by MARTY BRILL

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*He held life—and sudden death—in his strong fingers. Today he would show the world his power.*

---



YOU SEE, I'm very powerful! Yes, I certainly am! I'm probably the strongest man on this earth! My dear mother taught me never to lie, so I am merely stating the honest facts. I hate liars, you see. I like a man to be what he really is and to do what he really can do.

When a man lies to me, I get angry—oh yes, very angry!

"I want to take his head in my two hands and squeeze it, just keep right on squeezing it until I feel it giving in! Oh, I could do it, all right! I could squeeze that head until it was squashed into—well, into mush! I could do it, because I'm very powerful, you see!"

"I'm not just boasting."

"No, I'm telling you all of this merely because I wish to remain a truthful man at all times. Also, I'm warning you. Yes, when I get angry, I simply forget how powerful I am. I don't realize what I'm doing, when I get angry. And, when a man lies to me I get angry, very angry. I hate liars, you see."

"Now, that man on the bus. I knew he was staring at me! I was watching him carefully out of the corner of my eye. He was staring at me all right! Now, I don't believe that a man ought to stare at other people. I get very angry when a man stares at me. So, I got right up and slapped that stupid man!"

"And then that stupid man started screaming! So, I told him that he ought not to have stared at me! And he kept right on screaming! Then he hollered that he had *not* been staring at me! He lied, you see. And, I hate liars! And, his lying screams were hurting my ears.

"So, I put my hand over his mouth and squeezed that stupid man's head. Then, the head—well,

his head gave way, and, *everyone* was screaming. Then those policemen came; and, well—you know all the rest of it.

"I just wanted to tell you the whole truth. Now, those policemen have been lying to me! They've been lying about that chair, Father!"

"Yes, I know that it's really the electric chair! Those policemen have lied to me about it, but I know what it is, all right! And, I am getting very angry about it all! I hate liars, you see. So, I'm going to fool them! I'm not going to let them know how angry I am about their lies! No, Father, I'm going to lead them on!"

"I'm going to let them take me and strap me into that chair! I'm going to sit there, listening to all their lies, getting angrier and angrier, until they think they've got me all strapped and bound! But, they don't know how powerful I am, you see! So, then I'm going to tear those straps right off! I'm going to tear their stupid straps into little shreds!"

"Then I'm going to get those lying policemen! I'm going to get their heads in my two hands and squeeze them! Just keep right on squeezing them until—well, you know!"

"I can do it, when I'm really very angry. That's because I'm very powerful, you see!"

"Just watch. I can take your head like this and . . ."



## THE CURE

*My wife was a born matchmaker. But that  
was before she made her last rendezvous  
—with bullets and blood in the night.*

by CARROLL MAYERS

IT'S GENERALLY conceded that most women—wives especially—are inveterate matchmakers at heart. Certainly my bride Julie was no exception.

In the fourteen months since our marriage, our social contacts had gradually resolved into relationships with our own set, neglecting

former associates as yet unattached, but every so often I'd have occasion to present to Julie an eligible bachelor.

At such instances she would immediately flick through her mental file of ladies in waiting with the surety of a high-speed computer, considering, rejecting, selecting,

plotting a subsequent confrontation.

I'd just about given up trying to dissuade her, as had, indeed, her detective lieutenant brother. Fortunately, for him, Ed Talbot had been happily wed for some eight years.

All of which isn't to suggest I wasn't at least partially responsible for the frenetic events of that crisp October evening. I was. I took Bill Ashton home to dinner.

But it was Julie's penchant for romantic promotion that really sparked the fuse.

It all started when I got back to town—I commute to Capitol City—and found my car wouldn't be ready for another half hour. I'd left it at the garage that morning for a motor tune-up, but they were short-handed and had run into some trouble with the fuel pump. Whatever, to kill the time I visited a nearby bar—and ran into Ashton.

Bill Ashton and I had known each other in high school, but we'd never been particularly close friends. Ashton had been the complete extrovert, brash, self-confident. From high school we'd gone on to different colleges, and while we'd both made the usual periodic returns home, we hadn't sought each other out.

After college, we'd settled into our respective careers—his, I'd heard, was public relations. I'd stayed on in town, subsequently

marrying Julie; Ashton had sought a more cosmopolitan base. I hadn't seen him for some years.

From the foregoing, you'll likely believe there was no special reason for me to extend a dinner invitation, and you're right. In point of fact, the suggestion wasn't even in my mind when I first recognized Ashton, finishing a martini at the far end of the bar.

"Hi, fellow," I said, taking an adjacent stool and holding out my hand. "Good to see you back."

"Hello, Paul." His smile was ready, his grip firm. "It's just for the day; a personal matter. I'm catching the ten-ten express."

I motioned the barkeep, indicating a refill for Ashton, a duplicate for myself. "Too bad you couldn't stay over."

His smile held.

"I suppose it is," he agreed, "but in my business they keep you running."

Patronizing? To a degree, yes. Knowing Ashton, though, I tried to ignore a mild spurt of irritation. "Public relations, isn't it?"

"That's right."

"Things really humming, eh?"

"Couldn't be better." He savored his drink. "What about you?"

"I'm in production control with Standard Ceramics," I told him. I couldn't help adding, "Doing pretty well."

"Married?"

"Yes," I said, "for over a year."

"Anyone I know?"

"I think so. Julie Talbot. Her brother Ed's on the police force."

Ashton nodded, gaze a bit sardonic.

"It figures," he told me.

"Eh?"

"You, married. I always pegged you for the domestic bit."

My irritation burgeoned a mite.

"You're not?" I countered.

"Nuh-uh. No time."

I shook my head. "When the right girl comes along, you'll make time."

He drained his glass.

"Don't bet on it," he assured me. "A lone rider goes farthest."

In sober truth, I suppose my unwitting dinner invitation was triggered at that point. At any event, I was abruptly conscious of an overwhelming desire to show Bill Ashton just how far I'd come: a nice suburban home, a pretty wife, our sundry acquisitions—in short, all the evidence of my 'success.'

"You're a cynic," I remarked pleasantly, "but I won't argue with you. You haven't eaten?"

"No."

"All right, then. Come on out to the house, meet Julie again and have dinner."

He sobered somewhat. "Thanks, Paul, but I wouldn't want to impose—"

"You won't be imposing; we'll enjoy having you." I finished my own drink. "My car's being worked on, but it'll be ready shortly. Order

us another round while I phone Julie we're coming."

Ashton's look remained sober for another moment; then his smile came back.

"All right," he agreed, getting out his wallet to pay for the drinks I'd intended buying. "But they tell me wives don't favor such short notice."

"Don't give it another thought," I assured him. "Julie will understand."

And she did—so readily, in fact, that I should have had an inkling of the truth before Ashton and I arrived some forty minutes later. As it was, still anticipating my rebuttal of Ashton's cynicism, I gave no further thought to Julie's prompt acquiescence until I toolled my car into the drive and recognized the yellow compact model drawn up ahead of me.

The compact belonged to Susan Shepard, a young woman who was the local representative of a national cosmetics concern. The products, both feminine and masculine grooming aids, were good and Julie welcomed Susan's regular visitations and had become quite friendly with her. Of more import at the moment, however, was the fact that Susan Shepard was a Miss.

Right then, the script became all too familiar. Perhaps Julie had remembered Bill Ashton; perhaps she hadn't. It didn't matter. What did matter was that Susan Shepard had chanced to be making one of

her periodic calls when I'd phoned, and Julie had casually suggested she stay on for dinner, thereby meeting Ashton who, hopefully, would match Susan's marital status.

Julie lost no time in ascertaining that vital point. Highlights of ex-



citement dancing in her hazel eyes, she maneuvered me into a whispered aside scant seconds after I'd introduced her guests to each other. "I thought I remembered him. He's not married?"

What could I say?

"No, he's not," I muttered.

"I'm so glad; he seems nice."

"For Pete's sake, hon, not again—"

But Julie was beyond listening. A charming hostess in her private element, she graciously plied Ashton and Susan with smiles, small talk and pre-dinner martinis, an effusion of pleasant blandishment to put the pair at ease.

I'd have wagered a month's pay that even Julie's promotion would not have influenced wordly Bill Ashton; or, for that matter, self-sufficient Susan Shepard. But you never know. Within the hour, the two were exchanging glances and conversation which intimated

more than polite interest. And following dinner, that interest patently grew.

"They like each other! I know it!" Clearing away the dishes, Julie expressed delight to me in the kitchen, her eyes dancing again. "Already, they're beginning to ignore us!"

That, I felt, was a slight exaggeration. Still, I wasn't too surprised when, shortly before nine, Ashton checked his watch, shot a sidewise look at Susan, then got to his feet.

"I'd better get started," he told me. "I don't want to miss my train." He smiled at my radiant wife, added, "I really enjoyed the dinner, Julie. Thank you for having me."

Momentarily, Julie's face fell at the apparent termination of her plot. "But it's so early; Paul said you were catching the ten-ten—"

She broke off, and I knew she too was no longer surprised. It was as though we both were bit players in a contrived playlet, feeding lines to the romantic leads. So confident was Julie of the script that she didn't even glance at Susan as she told Ashton, "It was our pleasure. Paul will drive you to the station."

Susan was no less deft in picking up her cue. "That won't be necessary, Paul," she assured me, "I can drop Mr. Ashton."

She arose, collected her sample case.

"It was a lovely dinner, Julie," she said. "I'm so glad you asked

me to stay." She turned to Ashton.

"Ready?"

Ashton's return look indicated he still was riding the script hard. His answer was a warm, "Ready."

So that was that. After they had gone, I slumped on the sofa, drew a deep breath and regarded Julie soberly. "You'll never stop, will you?"

She grinned impishly, settled beside me. "Why should I? You saw how taken they were with each other. That's why they left early."

"I know that."

"Right now, with over an hour to spare, they're probably having a drink at some intimate little place, really getting acquainted."

"I know that too. But, damn it, hon—"

I sighed. "At ten-thirty you'll probably phone Susan to learn what she really thought of the guy."

Julie laughed. "I hadn't considered it, but that's an idea. Now, quit frowning."

I don't know whether or not Julie actually would have called Susan at her home. But at ten-forty-five our own phone rang, and from then on the point was academic.

When I answered, a woman's voice queried, "Paul Phelan?"

"Speaking."

"Mr. Phelan, this is Mrs. Strong at Mercy Hospital. I'm calling at the request of William Ashton. We don't want to alarm you, but Mr.

Ashton felt you should know a Miss Susan Shepard and himself have been brought here to Emergency."

I stiffened, my scalp prickling. Julie, catching my expression, de-up. Paul, what *is* it?"

I sliced air to quiet her. "What happened, Mrs. Strong?"

"There was a mugging outside a tavern," the woman said, then went on with a brief summary. "Mr. Ashton wanted us to inform you, particularly about Miss Shepard," she repeated as she concluded.

I said, "Thank you very much, Mrs. Strong. I'll be there in a few minutes."

Julie clutched my arm as I hung up. "Paul, what *is* it?"

"Some hood mugged Ashton as he and Susan got into her car outside a tavern," I told her, suddenly aware the action could have been triggered by Ashton flashing the contents of his wallet inside the place, as he had earlier in my presence. "The hood had a gun; Ashton tried to resist and the man shot him in the stomach, then struck down Susan and escaped in her car."

Julie's knuckles bruised her lips. "Oh, no!"

"That was a woman from Mercy Hospital, probably the night supervisor," I finished. "Susan's unconscious with a concussion, but Ashton was able to talk, give them our name before they took him into emergency surgery." I swung

toward the coat closet. "I'm going over there."

Julie said nothing, but was right on my heels. I checked her. "There's no need for you to come." I said simply. "You're all upset now—"

"I'm going, Paul. Please, can't we hurry?"

I'd anticipated as much, for all my attempted dissuasion, and said no more as I helped her into her coat. At that hour, traffic was light; we reached the hospital in ten minutes.

The nurse on duty at the lobby desk directed us to the proper wing, and we'd just come off the elevator, were seeking the floor supervisor, when we were spotted and quickly approached by a stocky man in civilian dress: Detective Lieutenant Ed Talbot, Julie's brother.

"Hello, Sis; Paul." Talbot's greeting was somber. "Good of you to come."

Julie's query was strained, anxious. "Are they going to be all right, Ed?"

Talbot nodded tightly. He was some five years older than Julie, a well-built, well-groomed man with a keen mind. Ordinarily, I knew, he would have assigned an underling to follow through on the hospital's report, but knowledge of Julie's and my indirect involvement had brought him personally into the affair.

"We hope so," he said. "The girl's still unconscious. They're

taking pictures, holding her for tests. And Ashton's wound is serious, but I understand the prognosis is favorable." He shifted his gaze to me. "They both were your dinner guests?"

"That's right," I said. I went on, acquainted Talbot with the evening as it had evolved. I mentioned only my invitation to Bill Ashton, made no reference to Julie's ploy with Susan, and if Talbot understood or suspected the latter, he gave no sign.

"I imagine they stopped at that tavern for a final drink," I wound up, "and Ashton flashed his wallet too much, gave an idea to some punk with a gun."

Talbot nodded again. "From what Talbot was able to say, he didn't know the hood had followed them outside until he accosted them, demanded the money. The street's badly lighted at that spot Ashton couldn't even approximate a description."

Julie had been listening attentively.

"What happens now?" she asked.

"For now, nothing specific unless we get a break," Talbot said quietly. "The hood abandoned the girl's car a dozen blocks from the tavern. Ashton couldn't give the license number, but we know it's the car from Miss Shepard's identification in a sample case she'd left on the seat."

The lieutenant paused reflect-

tively. "The punk probably won't risk holding on to what could be a murder weapon, will likely throw it down a sewer. But a wad of cash could be something else."

Julie's hazel eyes were intent. "You mean once he figures he's clear, he'll still have the rest of the night ahead of him?"

"Something like that," Talbot



conceded. "I've already got men checking all the bars within a six-block radius of where we located the girl's car, but after I'm through here I figure to make the rounds myself, see if any barkeep's spotted a late arrival with some excess money."

Julie's close look held. Abruptly, she said, "I'm going with you."

I had a sudden notion that undcurrents of which I was not fully appreciative were at play, but, such suspicion aside, I didn't relish the thought of Julie traipsing around strange bistros and taverns late at night, even in the company of her detective brother.

I said, "Now, wait a minute—"

Talbot interrupted me.

"Relax, Paul," he said. "Julie isn't going anywhere except home with you."

Julie's chin lifted. "You can both relax, because I'm doing nothing of the sort," she declared firmly. "I know—neither of you have said as much, but you're thinking I'm responsible for this awful affair. Well, perhaps I am in a way, having Susan meet Bill, but I certainly couldn't have foreseen the rest."

She stopped, eyes sparkling. "And I'm not about to go quietly back home now."

That vague notion of an unvoiced motivation nibbled stronger, but I still couldn't pin it down. So when Talbot made no direct rebuttal to his sister's pronouncement, but only looked askance at me, I tucked Julie's arm in mine, said, "I guess that makes two of us, Ed."

Talbot made a final check with the doctors in charge, arranged for immediate reports on the outcome of Ashton's surgery and Susan's tests to be relayed to his office, and then we started out, riding in Talbot's official car.

It was a slow, methodical business. I found myself doubting the validity of the town fathers' constant lament over lack of funds; the liquor licenses alone, it struck me, should have had the coffers overflowing. Bars, taverns, cafes, clubs—I'd never suspected their multiplicity.

In each, Ed Talbot's procedure was the same: a sharp survey, unobtrusive but penetrating, of the

patrons, a quiet questioning of barkeep or manager.

Results, however, continued negative and I began to doubt the wisdom or ultimate success of Talbot's action. It seemed very much a needle-in-haystack gambit, with the added handicap of no knowledge of our quarry's description or, for that matter, any assurance he'd continued on-the-town following his crime.

Talbot, though, continued his visitations. Further, in the more pretentious spots which featured cloakrooms he began to not only speak with the hatcheck girl but also to inspect the cloakroom itself. Pondering such a maneuver, I suddenly recalled Julie had managed a few personal words with her brother.

"What's with the cloakroom bit?" I asked her as Talbot maintained such an inspection at a particularly flashy club. "Did you tell Ed something?"

She assented. "I made a suggestion."

"What sort of suggestion?"

"About the man we're looking for," Julie said.

Abruptly, the notion which had nagged me recurred; Julies "suggestion," I now knew, had been her true motivation from the beginning. I sighed, said, "Maybe you'd care to tell me—"

I broke off. Ed Talbot had emerged from the confines of the cloakroom carrying a brown top-

coat, was talking with the girl in attendance, his features tight, expectant. The girl nodded, looked over the club's patrons hesitatingly for a moment, then pointed toward the bar.

Talbot turned, began purposefully threading his way through the assemblage. After a moment, his quarry became evident: a sharp-featured character in an off-the-rack brown suit, occupying a stool at the center of the bar.

The man was at ease, nursing a drink, idly surveying the crowd. His casual gaze flicked over Talbot, then did a double-take, hardened. Due to the risk of shooting an innocent customer, Talbot had not drawn his service revolver, but the grim expression on his face, his evident intent both shouted his identity to the hood. Decision flared in the man's eyes; as Talbot had surmised, he had disposed of his own gun, but he abruptly used his shot glass as a weapon, flung it hard at Talbot's head.

What followed has only one word: Pandemonium. Women screamed, men shouted as the hood leaped from his stool, attempted to fight his way through the crowd.

He almost made it. Talbot had ducked the shot glass, but still was six feet from the bar when the hood bolted..

Talbot whirled, lunged after the man. The hood was bulling clear. And then he struck a chair, stum-

bled, went down. Talbot collared him and that was it—

"Suppose he'd sat tight, tried to brazen it out?" I mused after a patrol wagon had answered Talbot's summons and we were leaving the scene in the lieutenant's car.

"He read me and panicked," Talbot said, "but even if he hadn't, the stuff that was in his topcoat pockets would have tied him in."

In the excitement, I'd forgotten the cloakroom business. I glanced at Julie, then back at Talbot.

"All right," I conceded, "what stuff?"

Talbot relaxed at the wheel.

"That's your cue, Sis," he told Julie.

Now that it was all over, Julie was regaining a bit of her normal spirits.

"Sample tubes of hair dressing and shaving cream from Susan's selling case," Julie informed me simply. "When Ed told us she'd left her case on the seat of her car, I figured that mugger would find it, ransack it and likely pocket what he could use. That's why I suggested Ed's checking cloakrooms, then

questioning the attendant if he came up with anything."

Elementary, Watson? I suppose so. But only Julie had thought of it. Not her keen-minded detective brother. And certainly not her tag-along husband.

Ed Talbot chuckled briefly as he caught my comprehension, then sobered. "Sis," he said, "I'd like to bring up a point you sort of touched on before." He hesitated, then went ahead. "Both Paul and I have discussed it with you Lord knows how often, and while I grant you weren't responsible for everything that happened tonight, it just proves how unpredictable your doggoned matchmaking can be."

In the glow from the dash, Julie's eyes were big and round and very earnest.

"I know," she answered gravely, "and I promise. From now on—never again."

The declaration was nice to hear, but in the shadows Julie's hands were concealed in the folds of her coat. Her fingers might have been uncrossed, but I wouldn't bet on it.





# HAPPY HOUR HOLDUP

by  
**JACK  
FORREST  
HARRY**

*Behind me a dead man sprawled in his blood: ahead the road blocks were waiting. I grinned. I had a deadly weapon—the chic little babe beside me.*

## THE NEON SIGN said *Happy Hour Night Club*.

As a club, night or otherwise, it was a crock. There were only two people in the whole joint when I squeezed through the door, including the bartender himself, and he was old enough to be my grandfather's papa.

The other was a chick, young, a looker, one I'd go for if I had time.

I didn't.

"Don't move!" I snapped, lev-

elling my rod in warning. They both froze near the cash register. "Take your hand outa that bag, babe, and both of you get your mitts up where I can watch 'em."

They didn't argue.

I relaxed. It was going to be easier than I'd expected, even though it didn't look like I'd make much haul from the place. Breaking out of prison at one in the morning posed problems, among them find-

ing somebody to change clothes with at that hour and some place to knock over for a stake.

I'd mugged a guy about my size and stripped him, but he'd only had three singles in his wallet. Not enough to carry me far. I needed loot, a lot of loot, so I had to take a chance on something big enough. The *Happy Hour* was the only joint I'd found open in the whole hick town.

I hoped the old guy and doll with him wouldn't see through my dummy gun. They shouldn't, not when guards at the lockup ten miles away had fallen flat for it.

"Hey, babe, that your heap outside, the one with the motor running?" I'd seen two cars in the lot, one wasting gas and carrying out of state plates.

She nodded.

"Good. You'll be giving me a lift then." I grinned.

"I don't think—"

"Don't think!" I chopped her off, my grin changing to a glower, and she knew better than to go on, although she frowned thoughtfully. "That goes for you too." I waved my phony rod at the barkeep, who looked so scared he might croak from a heart attack any time.

At least the girl didn't seem shook. Wary, yes, but not scared a bit. I had to give her credit for guts. Might even give her credit for something else later, I mused, keeping her sleek, bouffant self swimming in view.

Her tumbled hair was raw blue-black silk. Her eyes were deep set, intelligent but kind of wild. She had a gypsy look about her, a liveliness not to be denied, not even by danger. I found myself losing track of what I'd come to do because of her.

With effort, I yanked myself out of the day dream.

"Clean out the cash register and anything else you got," I said to the bartender. "Pass it over here careful-like. No tricks. I'd as soon cut you down as look at you."

"Yes, sir." He turned, shaking, and began emptying the cash register into a paper bag which he took from under the counter.

"You're the escaped convict, aren't you?"

"Huh?" I looked directly at her.

"You're the man who escaped from the county jail this morning just before you were to be transferred to the state prison to begin serving your sentence. Am I right?"

"Yeah. How'd you guess?"

"It was on the news in my car radio. I don't think you'll get far. They've put up road blocks all around here."

"Thanks for the info. I'll keep it in mind."

She shrugged. "You probably knew already."

"I ain't dumb enough to think they'd forgot all about me." I laughed. "And I'll tell you somethin' else too. I'll get by 'em. Know how I'm gonna do it?"

"I can guess. You expect me to

drive you. But how do you know I'll do it?"

"Oh, you'll do it. You'll do it or you'll be dead," I growled, trying to frighten her.

But it didn't shake her at all.

"I see," was all she said.

I turned to the bartender. "Hurry it up, gramps. I ain't got all night."

He didn't say anything. He finished and passed the bag across the counter to me. It seemed pretty light.

"This all you got? You sure?" I waved the bag at him.

He nodded, looking scared.

"It's all he's got," the girl said. "How much do you expect him to have in a little town like this?"

I looked at her. She was right. But that wasn't what drew my attention. She didn't belong in this town. Her hairdo was too smart for the country. So was her slinky sheath dress. Despite the untamed look in her eyes, her sophistication spelled big city. I meant to go to the city. She would know the way.

"Okay," I said. "That's it then. You, gramps, over there." I pointed to the end of the bar where I headed myself. When we reached it, he lunged for me. I rapped him on the side of his head with my phony rod. He went down like a stone.

I checked his pulse. It had stopped!

For a minute my head buzzed. I hadn't wanted murder on my

hands with everything else. Now I had it.

I turned back to the girl. I'd heard her gasp slightly when I clubbed the old guy, but that was all. She was a cool one, cooler than me.

But I couldn't let her know that.

"You see I ain't kiddin'," I growled. "He's dead. Least he can't turn in an alarm. You'll get the same if you don't play along."

She shrugged. "You're holding the gun. I've little choice."

"Just so's you remember it. Let's hit the heap now." I pointed my rod at the exit as I grabbed a bottle of whiskey from behind the bar to take along.

She didn't argue. She went out in front of me. At the car, she paused.

"You drive," I said, climbing into the back seat. "That way I can keep an eye on you."

She nodded and got in behind the wheel. In less time than it takes to pull a trigger, we'd blasted off and were rolling up the highway.

"Hey! Slow down!" I shouted. "You think I want to get picked up for speedin'?"

"It would be less charge than for what you're wanted now."

"Lay off the cracks or you're dead," I said savagely. But I didn't mean it. I hadn't wanted to kill the old guy. I hadn't wanted to kill anybody. But I'd always known I would if I had to—my kind of life meant no holds barred, no stops.

If I hadn't been picked up, tried and convicted on that bank caper, I might already have knocked over somebody else. The old geezer's death was an accident, but it did prove what I'd known all along, that I was capable of killing.

A little later I felt better and asked, "Which way you heading?"

"East, I believe."

"Good. Just the way I want! Into the city. You know the way. Let's get there."

"I told you, there are road blocks. It's impossible."

I thought about that for a minute. She did have a point. Even if she were willing to help me, the car would be searched at the first road block and I'd be spotted immediately. Which left me only one choice. Not a bad one at that, I grinned, staring at her in the darkness.

I'd have to hole up somewhere. But not alone. Oh no, not alone. The cops were looking for an escaped convict, not a young honeymooning couple from out of state. It was a perfect cover. And there were extras, maybe. I nodded. Those months in jail had been lonely.

The first motel we approached had a vacancy sign, so I pushed my rod into her back.

"Turn in here," I ordered.

She smiled, oddly, but she did as she was told.

"Don't get no funny ideas. Play along and don't try to warn nobody,



or I'll shoot you and them too. You're my wife from now on. Get me?"

"I get you," she replied, but she still didn't sound the least bit frightened.

The clerk eyed us suspiciously while I signed the register. He brightened when I paid him in advance from the money I'd taken in the *Happy Hour*, which had turned out to be more than I'd expected, more than two hundred dollars. The old guy must have kept a whole week's receipts stashed in the joint.

"Just leave your key in your room when you go in the morning, Mr. Hudson," the clerk said as we left the office.

"All right. We will."

Our room was way down at the end. There were only a few cars on the parking area; the place was practically deserted. So much the better, I figured, just in case my little wife decided on any funny stuff and I had to make some noise.

After the lock clicked on our unit, sealing us off from the outside, I relaxed. Everything had gone so easy, I felt like a little bragging.

"Worked just dandy!" I said,

tossing my phony rod on a chair and twisting the cap off the bottle of whiskey.

Her eyes went to the gun.

"Don't get no ideas." I laughed. "That's part of it. You won't get nowhere if you try grabbin' it."

"Part of it? What do you mean?"

I chuckled some more. "Mean just what I said, babe. That's a phony. It worked like a charm, but now I don't need it no more, because when I'm finished with you I'm gonna tie you up anyway. And if you scream, I'll just choke you with my bare hands. Get it?"

Strangely, she smiled. "You mean you haven't even got a real gun?"

"Nope." I was proud of myself. I took a long drag on the bottle, then blew out air. "Look what I've managed to pull off with nothin' but a hunk of iron and guts," I added when the whiskey stopped burning my throat enough so that I could speak again.

She laughed. I was surprised. I'd expected her to be disgusted with herself for being as fooled as everybody else. But she didn't appear disgusted at all.

"Well, that's fine, that makes everything very much easier," she said. "I don't need to wait until you're not looking, now, do I?"

"Wait? Wait for what?" I muttered, starting toward her as I saw her hand go into her purse.

But I'd started far too late. A neat little .22 Minx Berratta sud-

denly came out of the purse and ended up pointed right at me.

"Hold it right there," she said.

I did.

"That's fine," she continued. "Don't do anything foolish and you won't get hurt. I have nothing particularly against you, so if you'll just empty your pockets of that money and push it over the bed to me, I'll say good-by to you and let you go on and play your own game with the police."

"The money! You want the money, and you're not going to turn me in!"

"Of course I want the money. Why do you think I drove all the way out here at this hour? And no, I won't turn you in. You're nothing to me, except that you barged in when I was about to rob that poor old man you killed. But that's a rap that'll be hung on you and you alone, and I'll have what I came for anyway.

"Now, let's not waste any more time. The money, quickly, or I'll put little holes all through you. The police will no doubt find you easily enough by morning, since you're losing me, your cover, but I don't think they'll particularly want to find you like swiss cheese."

They did, too, find me by morning. And they just laughed when I told them about the aftermath of the *Happy Hour* holdup—laughed as if they'd never heard anything so funny, and didn't believe one word I said.

# THE PERSUADERS

*He knew a lot, the gentle old professor. Too much to stay alive. One night, when there was no moon, men would . . .*



by GEORGE F. BELLEFONTAINE

THE STREET WAS dark and in the distance Malcolm Stone could hear laughter, singing and the sharp crack of fireworks. He wondered what it was like to enjoy all that is Spain during the summer fiesta and then he concerned himself with the lighted window across the street. Beyond that window was the man he had trailed for three solid weeks—from West Germany to Switzerland; through France,

across the border and finally to this small village forty kilometers south of Valencia.

It was the end of the line. The man had been in that room for two days now, and although it had been a difficult and tiring journey, Stone knew the toughest part was yet to come.

He sighed, straightened his wide shoulders and started across the narrow street, then up the stone

steps, two flights, through an open door and down a long hall to the door at the far end. He tested the knob. It turned. He shoved hard and the door flew open.

"Professor Hermann Muntz, I presume."

Malcolm closed the door behind him and then fixed his gaze on the professor, who was kneeling on the bed, edging his back closer to the wall until he could go no farther. He was a thin little man with white hair and a good start on a white beard. He didn't look as though he were capable of discovering a new formula for a monstrous bomb, but he had.

Professor Muntz trembled as he said, "There must be some—some mistake. I am not Herr Muntz."

"Come, come, Professor. I've been three steps behind you since you crossed the border from France."

"Who—who are you?"

"Malcolm Stone."

"You sound American."

"I'm an agent, Professor. I have orders to take you back."

"I do not believe you."

"Very well," Stone said. "Your name is Hermann Muntz, a professor of physics. Your wife died six years ago. Your son was killed when the Russians entered Berlin at the close of the war. You escaped to the West and taught at several universities until your colleagues coaxed you into scientific research."

"Up until three weeks ago you were working at the defence research laboratory in Stuxbourg. Then you left a brief note saying you were finished. After that you disappeared. Would you like to hear more about yourself?"

"No," the professor said, his eyes lowered. "How did you find me so soon?"

"I'm an expert at my job, Professor. You're an amateur when it comes to covering your trail. You didn't even lock the door to this room."

Malcolm Stone turned and slid the latch into place.

"I will not go back, Mr. Stone. Ever."

"Do you mind?" Malcolm asked as he lowered his tired body into a chair facing the bed. He fished inside his jacket and produced a pack of cigarettes. He offered one to the old man, who declined, and then lit one for himself. "We can't leave a man like you on the loose, Professor."

"Please—please go away. Pretend you did not find me. I am sick of that world back there. I want to be a human, a simple man among simple people. Please go away, Mr. Stone."

"I can't. You were working on a theory, Professor, a formula for a bomb so powerful it makes the H-Bomb look like a firecracker. That's why I can't leave you on the loose. Surely you can understand what would happen if you fell into

the wrong hands. They'd get the formula from you, by torture if necessary—”

“I destroyed the formula, along with all my notes.”

“It's still in your brain, Professor. There are ways of extracting information from the brain. You're a scientist: you should know that. If the wrong people possessed your bomb, they could force the rest of the world into submission under the threat of annihilation. As long as you're roaming around, the free world can't feel secure.”

“I belong to myself, not the free world.”

“When you developed that bomb, you no longer belonged to yourself.”

“I curse the bomb! It was wrong from the beginning, but I was disillusioned into thinking that freedom cannot exist unless it is backed with power. That is why I developed my theory. Then I saw it, a mass of figures on paper and I realized the suffering and death it could bring about. I had created it. Me, a man who could not harm a living creature.

“I once killed a bird, accidentally with my car. It took me three days to get over it. I do not want to destroy or be a party to destruction. I am old, tired, and wish to enjoy the few years I have left.”

“Professor, there are foreign agents on your tail at this very moment. They'll stop at nothing to get that formula.”

“That is a chance I will have to take, Mr. Stone.”

Malcolm knew the old man could be obdurate. He wasn't going back.

“I'll have to call my superiors.”

The professor pointed to the telephone on a table near the door. “It comes with the flat. I asked the owner to have it removed. But it is still working.”

Malcolm crossed the room and dialed the operator. He asked for a number in Valencia and waited. The answer came, “Regan here.”

“It's Stone. No good, Regan. The professor refuses to budge.”

“We figured that,” Regan said. “Okay, you know what's next.”

“Isn't there another way?”

“See you later.” Regan hung up.

“Well?”

Malcolm returned to the chair. He lit another cigarette. “If you're not coming back, then I'll have to stay with you.”

“You have no right—”

“Better get used to it, Professor. From here on out, I'm your shadow.”

The professor protested while Malcolm sat calmly in the chair, his hand resting on the bulge of a thirty-eight beneath his coat. But Malcolm was pleased when the old man tired and mumbled himself to sleep. Malcolm Stone remained awake.

It was that half dark, half light before dawn when the two men burst into the room. Malcolm start-



ed out of the chair, his thirty-eight already in his hand, but a heavy fist caught him behind the ear and the floor slammed into his face.

He was groggy and weak and he could hear the old man scuffling with the intruders. Then a muffled cry for help, footsteps fading. Malcolm crawled to the window, pulled himself up in time to see the blurred form of a black sedan, tires screeching as it tore off down the road along the coast.

His neck ached as he applied cold water to his face. Then he hurried out of the room, down the stone steps to the street and up the two blocks where he had parked his Jaguar. He slipped behind the wheel, slammed the car into gear and raced off in the same direction as the black sedan.

Three kilometers later, he observed the cut-off leading down

into a small cove. There, half hidden by several empty boat houses, he saw the tail end of the black sedan.

He braked and shoved the lever into neutral, leaving the motor running. Then he made his way down the winding road to the boat houses. He heard voices and followed them to the source, his thirty-eight ready.

"The formula, Professor Muntz. We want it now or my friend will slit your scrawny throat."

The boat house had no glass in the window and it was doorless except for the opening at the front. Malcolm eased his head around the window frame. It was dark inside but he could make out the professor's form, his hands lashed to a post. The two men stood at his side. One held a knife.

"I swear I know of no formula I am not the man you want."

Malcolm felt the old man wasn't very convincing.

"Kill him then," the man said and the other one placed his knife against the professor's face.

"Please," the old man wailed.

Malcolm Stone hurried around to the front of the boat house. They saw him enter and started his way. Malcolm fired twice and the two men slumped to the floor.

The professor trembled and sobbed as Malcolm cut him loose. He half carried the speechless old man back to the Jaguar.

They were nearing the village

when the professor managed to speak.

"Who were—"

"Foreign agents," Malcolm finished. "I warned you."

The professor lowered his head, his body trembling violently. Malcolm reached for the glove compartment and handed the old man a bottle of blanco wine. "Have a good swallow of this."

The professor obeyed gladly.

"Where—where are we going?"

"Back to your flat," Malcolm said. "Then I'm getting out of here."

"But but I do not understand. You said you would—"

"Yeah, I know what I said, but that was before I almost got myself killed." He rubbed the back of his neck. "I did my duty. I followed them and saved you, but if they think I'm going to go on risking my life so you can enjoy the simple way of living, they're crazy."

"But—"

"You wanted to be left alone, didn't you?"

The professor didn't answer, but Malcolm knew he was thinking a lot and by the time they arrived at the flat, he was certain of what would follow.

"Wait here, Mr. Stone."

The professor disappeared into his flat, reappeared later, carrying a traveling bag. He placed the bag in the rear seat and climbed in beside Malcolm.

"Does this mean you're going back to West Germany?"

"Yes."

Malcolm turned the Jaguar and pointed it toward Valencia. As they drove through the early morning light, the grey-brown countryside with olive groves and palm trees whizzing by, Malcolm's eyes drifted occasionally from the road to the professor and back again. The old man appeared sad and in deep thought.

"I'm really sorry it had to turn out this way," Malcolm said. "I know what it's like to yearn for something you can't have, or be or do. I get sick of this back alley stuff and I get sick of some of the things I have to do. But I do them because somebody's got to do them and because I'm better qualified than the chap who takes his girl to the movies on a Saturday night, or the guy who's happy drinking beer and watching a baseball game. I'm not very good with words, Professor, but what I'm trying to say is that I am—"

"I understand exactly, Mr. Stone."

After a short silence, Malcolm asked, "Will you work on the formula again?"

"Yes," the professor sighed. "It still frightens me, but after what happened this morning, I know that such a bomb is a necessary evil. I had been locked up in a laboratory and had lost touch with reality. Those two men who would have killed me, they were reality, Mr. Stone." He hesitated a moment,

then added, "It will be hard work. I had destroyed all my notes along with the formula, but I will find the formula again and—"

"And maybe by just having it, we'll never have to use it," Malcolm said hopefully.

REGAN WAS waiting at the airport. Another man helped the professor out of the Jaguar and started to lead him away toward a small aircraft on the field. He halted the man and motioned to Malcolm. Malcolm got out of the car and went to him.

"Would you have left me alone back there, Mr. Stone, really?"

Malcolm smiled and for the first time he saw the faint trace of a smile on the professor's wrinkled face.

"Good luck to you, Mr. Stone."

Malcolm watched after the professor until he disappeared inside the aircraft.

Regan came up and said, "Good work."

"It was a lousy trick," he said. He turned and stared at the aircraft.

"You sound as if it was all my doing. The first time you called to tell me where the professor was we discussed the theory that the old man was another one of those conscience-stricken scientists. Using the two men as an act of persuasion was your idea, not mine. When you called the second time and confirmed our—"

"All right, all right, it was my doing," Stone said angrily.

"Was anyone hurt?"

"Just my neck, but I suppose they had to make it look good. It was dark in the boat house and the old fellow was probably too frightened to notice that I was shooting at the floor anyway. Nobody was hurt, except maybe—"

"Who?"

"Forget it," Malcolm said, tearing his eyes away from the aircraft. "It was just a lousy trick."

"You're not getting human on me, are you, Stone?"

Malcolm looked at his red-haired superior and thought of all the terrible places he wanted to tell him to go, but he managed a smile and said, "Not as long as I have you to keep me company."

Regan nodded and smiled briefly. As he walked Malcolm back to the Jaguar, he said, "Point her toward Madrid. Our man there has new orders for you. I have to accompany the professor to West Berlin."

Regan slapped Malcolm Stone on the back, turned and hurried toward the waiting aircraft.

Malcolm shifted the lever into low and started away. He passed a group of tourists—Americans—leaving the airport, talking about bullfights, wine and fun. Malcolm Stone was too tired to let it bother him. Before Madrid or anything else, he was going to find a nice soft bed and sleep.

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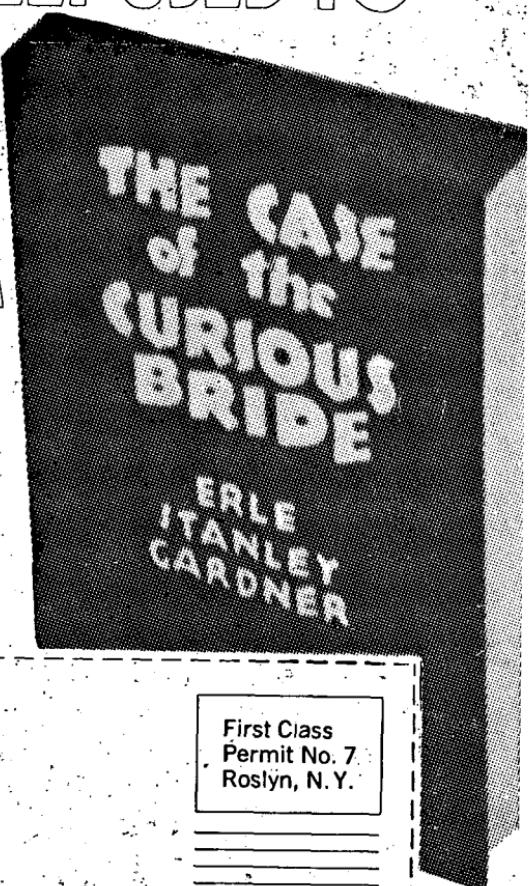
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